IN A WORLD

OF

HIS OWN.

BY

MRS. FRED. E. PIRKIS,

AUTHOR OF

"DISAPPEARED FROM HER HOME."

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IN A WORLD OF HIS OWN.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

"YOU are a seer of visions, Llewellyn March—a dreamer of dreams! Your feet scarcely touch this commonplace earth of ours at all. It is well you have friends and fortune to bear you, as with eagle's wings, over the rough stony ways of the world, and to keep your garments unsoiled from its mud and mire!"

There they stood, in the hot July evening, leaning over the dusty London balcony, gazing down on the old elm-planted footway, which skirts the broad grey expanse of river. There they stood, old friends, true friends, in the glory of their manhood, their strength and vigour: Llewellyn March, artist, poet, musician, and sculptor, possessing all outward gifts of beauty, all inward gifts of mind and soul; honoured by men, beloved by women, and heir to a large estate and half a million of money. Side by side they stand: Llewellyn March and Maximilian Trego, the hard-worked London doctor, strong in mind and body, true at heart, and denying himself every luxury and comfort in order to supply both to his widowed mother and her small household.

"A dreamer of dreams," echoes Llewellyn

March softly, his sweet almost girlish mouth breaking into a half smile. "Yes, you are right in one way, old Max, for I am but as a half-awakened sleeper, and with blinking eyes look abroad and see not the fiftieth part of the glory and beauty of the world around. See," he added with sudden energy, "how the tints and shadows of the evening are deepening and softening under this spreading after-glow. See how it lights up the gleaming sapphire of the river, and the emerald green on the opposite bank! Hush! what song is that?" He pauses. "Can it be a street minstrel? Wait a minute, Max, it comes nearer," and in the distance sounds a sweet, sad woman's voice, singing an old world ballad, the air full of music, although the words they cannot hear.

Max begins to growl, "The after-glow is

in your own imagination, Llewellyn, and is doing a considerable amount of deepening and softening this evening, it seems to me. My poor, commonplace eyes are resting on (to me) a very ordinary river-side scene in London, and my commonplace ears are listening to a very ordinary street minstrel, droning through a very ordinary street ballad."

Nearer draws the singer, and the words sound more distinctly—

> "Could you come back to me, back to me,
> Back with the face and the form that I knew?"

Llewellyn's face grows sad. "Max," he asks, "do you ever think of bright little Archie? It is now nearly eighteen years since he went out laughing and singing in the morning, and they brought him in cold and dead before night," and Llewellyn's

thoughts go back to the bitter, frosty afternoon when (himself a prisoner to the house from a sprained foot) he stood at the door, and watched a dark group of silent men bearing tenderly in their arms a fair-haired lifeless boy. "Killed on the spot," was what they said, and they pointed to a dark wound on the blue-veined temple, and told how he had slipped on the ice while skating, and had struck his forehead against a corner of the stone parapet.

Maximilian's thoughts, too, carry him back to a lonely ride some seven days later, when, then only a boy of fifteen, he was returning home on the day of Archie's funeral along steep slippery roads, and by frosted hedges. How he suddenly reined up his horse, lest it should stumble over some dark shadowy form, and how, under the dim moon and snow-

piled sky, he listened to wild, strange words which echo in his ears still.

"It was on the 14th of March," says Max, pursuing the train of his own thoughts.

"The 14th of March!" exclaims Llewellyn, turning his blue eyes full on his friend. "No, you forget, it was seven days previously. That was the day they hid him away for ever."

Close under the window sounds the woman's voice now—

"Oh, to call back the days that are not!"

And Llewellyn leans over the balcony and listens and looks.

What does he see? A dark, sallow-faced woman, about forty years of age, with thin, pinched features, and hard lines traced around mouth and brow. She might have been lovely

once, who can tell! But save large, dark, brilliant eyes, no traces of beauty remain.

"Give her some money and let her go," said Max, with his hand on his purse, and a sudden anxious look on his face. Llewellyn stops him.

"I want to hear her song throughout," he explains, "It is her voice which recalls so many memories, not the song alone. Then, too, her mouth;" he pauses again.

Now Max interferes. "What nonsense are you weaving out of your brain, Llewellyn?" he exclaims in positive anger. He throws the woman a shilling, and bids her go home and get some supper. "I cannot stand those droning, groaning ballad singers, and you, with your perfect ear and fastidious taste, to listen thus! It is incomprehensible!"

The woman's voice dies away in the distance—

"As I lay my heart on thy dead heart, Douglas."

So the song ends. The after-glow of the evening has faded, a sombre twilight has fallen, a dark bank of purple clouds rises slowly in the west, and a fresh wind brings down some dry leaves from the old elms.

Llewellyn faces round on his friend. "Max," he asks almost suddenly, "why do you shut your little sister up as you do now? Why is it I never see her? Little Anna and I were such good friends at one time, and now we never meet! I know she is in the house at the present moment, for I caught a glimpse of her through the half-closed door."

Max growls again. "What have you to do with Anna?" he asks in, for him, a vexed,

ill-tempered tone. "Why, whenever we meet, is it always, 'Anna, Anna?' Are you not satisfied with your thousand and one conquests over the hearts of women? Do you forget that you are betrothed to the noblest, loveliest lady in all the west of England? Do you forget that next week—"

"Ah! about next week I want to talk. You will bring Anna and Mrs. Trego down with you to our place, old Max. I want to introduce them to Lady Victoria."

Max jumps to his feet and looks at his watch. "Good night, Llewellyn, I have a patient, a very poor one, to attend in five minutes from now. No, thanks, you can't walk down with me, a bad fever case. It is useless running any risks." So they shake hands and say good night.

Llewellyn, with a thoughtful, wistful look

at the closed Venetian blinds and now lighted windows of the house, wanders along the old elm-planted footway, and weaves visions out of shadows, and fairy tales out of dancing moonlight, and wonders and wonders how it is Archie and Anna always come into his thoughts at the same time, how it was the woman's song brought both into his mind, and when and where he would meet that woman again.

And Max turns quietly into his little study —half study, half consulting-room—in that narrow house where space, before all things, had to be thought of and considered. The fever patient does not appear to occupy his thoughts now. He goes straight to his writing-table and takes a full-sized sheet of foolscap.

"It is time this were done," he says. "It

is true I am young and strong, and in full health, but I run risk of infection daily, and if I die with it unsaid, who will know?" He dips his pen in the ink, and then pauses, with his head resting on his hand, thinking and thinking.

At last he commences writing—

"On the 14th of March, 1853."

CHAPTER II.

A TRANQUIL lake, buried among the everlasting hills, reflecting deep, calm, blue skies and glowing dawns and sunsets.

A harp, fresh from the maker's hands, high pitched, in perfect accord, but as yet unawakened to tone and melody by the musician's fingers; so Anna Trego, in the dawn of early womanhood, sweet, fresh, unconscious, unfolded!

What will her future be? Will storms ever ruffle the smooth surface of the lake, and the blue sky shine no more from its clear

depths? Will the harp-strings loosen or break, or will they learn to give forth discordant notes to the touch of an erring musician? Who can tell?

She had never known any other home than the one she now lived in, nor any other life than the one she now led. That old-fashioned river-side house, with narrow windows and Queen Anne gateway, with long, dark passages inside, and low-roofed, narrow rooms and doorways, was the first and only one she had in her recollection.

An occasional three weeks in some lovely, sweet-scented valley in Kent, or among the nearer Surrey hills, as a break and refreshment from the routine of study, were the only changes in her experiences of home life and home pleasures.

There is a picture in one of the old

churches at Venice of a sweet girl-saint, with large, lustrous, blue-black eyes, a pale cream tint on cheek and brow, and a veil of blue-black hair hanging low on her neck (call it a Veronese, a Giorgione, or Titian, its mysticism and poetry is gone, and it becomes a catalogued "work of art"). Strangely it resembled Anna Trego in the firmness of the mouth and chin, and the perfect serenity and patience brooding over face and figure. And on her way to martyrdom, too!

Anna's surroundings in the old house had ever been quiet and sombre; but latterly the quiet had deepened into melancholy, and the sombreness into something of gloom. A cloud had spread itself over the household, which Anna could trace to no particular source, but could only feel was about and around her.

The mother, always dignified and reserved, had grown silent and almost morose.

Max, too, had become strangely altered of late. He seemed to be giving himself up more and more to his profession, and rarely spent even half an hour at a time in her society and his mother's.

Once he had been wont to take Anna to various places of amusement in and about London as a suitable recreation from her patient and industrious life of study; but of late he had given this up, and Anna had gradually become entirely secluded from all society.

This did not trouble her in the slightest degree, as her love for art and study was intense and all-absorbing; but what did trouble her was the sense of estrangement which she felt was daily growing and increasing between herself and Max.

"He never even kisses me now," she complained once to the mother, as they sat working and painting in a little back room, with a good northern light, which had been specially set apart as Anna's painting room and study.

The mother shook her head and grew sad and grave, and, to Anna's fancy, seemed to look at her face and drooping girl's figure critically rather than approvingly, and not as a mother who takes pride and pleasure in her young daughter's developing beauties.

Once Anna had essayed to question Max; but he seemed so thoroughly pained and grieved, so fearful lest she should be feeling the need for young and cheerful society, or the usual round of girls' amusements, that she hastened to turn the subject, and to assure him how happy and contented she was with

her simple home pleasures, and how with her books and her easel, her harp and piano, she could never know dulness or monotony.

All the same she knew the cloud was there, and day by day she felt it lowered and deepened.

Her father she had never known. They told her he had died some few weeks after she was born. A country doctor, among the lovely Devon moors and hills, he had overworked his strength and developed the seeds of consumption lying latent in his system.

Plenty of traces, however, remained of him in their old house and furniture. Stiff old-fashioned portraits in high-backed arm-chairs, manuscripts in his writing, annotated books, carefully preserved by Max and his mother.

Anna seemed to know him well, and often

it occurred to her how strongly Max must resemble him in mind and body. The same broad forehead and massive, square-cut chin, the clear grey eyes and dark brown crisp hair, and beyond all the same straightforward honesty of purpose, dogged strength of will, and entire self-forgetfulness.

"Does ever a thought of self enter his mind?" she would sometimes wonder, when she saw him come in weary and drenched to the skin, and on receiving a message or note from some distant patient, start at once on a wet, dark walk.

Yet one half of his self-denial and self-sacrifice was unknown to her, and neither Anna nor the mother ever knew to what a low ebb Max's purse and resources had been at times reduced.

Once Anna, sitting in the twilight with the

mother, had wondered if Max could ever find one worthy, "half good enough," to be his wife.

"I do not think he will, Anna," the mother had replied, sadly, scarcely raising her eyes from her knitting.

"But he makes no attempt to find one," pursued the girl. "He goes nowhere, he sees no one." Then, as the thought flashed across her mind, she asked suddenly, "Mother, why is it Llewellyn March never comes near us now? I have not seen him for nearly a year. Yet I heard his voice in the balcony the other night, and it seems so strange for him to come and go without even speaking to us."

"Anna," said the mother, almost severely, "depend upon it, Max has some good reason for what he does. He never acts rashly nor

without reflection. Besides, what is Mr. March to you! So far removed from us in station, it is wonderful he should still keep up his boy's friendship for Max. It does not follow, however, he should be equally warm to Max's relatives."

"No," said Anna, thoughtfully. "But how good he was to me! always so gentle and protecting. I remember, in those days he seemed to me like the picture of Gabriel treading down Satan with the dark spirits veiling their faces and fleeing before him, I could not imagine anything evil remaining in his presence unabashed! With all his wonderful gifts and talents, he is yet so good, so simple-minded, one can see his soul in his face."

"Anna, Anna," and now the mother is really angry, "what nonsense is this? Do

not let your imagination carry you away thus. Mr. March has many gifts, no doubt; but remember, we know little of him now, and are never likely to know more. After his marriage he will be more than ever removed from our sphere!"

"After his marriage!" echoes Anna, opening wide her large, unconscious eyes.

"Yes," repeats the mother, "next month he will be married to the Lady Victoria Cathrow, a lady nobly connected, and very beautiful."

"I wonder," muses Anna, while her fingers are sketching a head and profile intended for the angel Gabriel, "if she be worthy of such an one as he?"

CHAPTER III.

"IF she be worthy of such an one as he!" No one who knew the Lady Victoria Cathrow personally would have dared to ask such a question. The orphan daughter of an English peer, she had been brought up in the strictest seclusion and with the most carefully refined education that could be imagined, by a spinster aunt, the Lady Mary Cathrow. Every talent and feeling that a young lady of rank should possess had been carefully cultivated in her, and every talent and feeling that a young lady of rank should not possess had been as carefully

weeded out; *noblesse oblige* had been the text upon which her education had been based, and well indeed had she responded to her education. Endowed by nature with wonderful personal beauty, with talents of a high order, and an extreme refinement and susceptibility of disposition, at eighteen years of age, when she made her first appearance in society, she possessed all the grace, the perfection of an exquisite hot-house flower, and as a hot-house flower was totally unsuited for any other atmosphere than the one in which she had been reared.

Llewellyn March had met her in her first London season, at the house of a mutual friend. The first time he saw her his artistic sympathies were aroused. Never in all his life had he seen anything half so beautiful, lovely as a dream, and scarcely as real, she

seemed to him in her delicate ethereal beauty. The second time they met his poetic sympathies were aroused by the refinement, the exquisite sensibility which moved in her every movement, breathed in her every tone, and hung about her as subtly as the scent hangs about the rose. The third time they met his deepest affections were engaged by what he believed to be the sweetness and loveableness of her disposition, and the end of the London season saw them betrothed to each other, with the full consent of their respective guardians, and the late autumn fixed upon for their marriage.

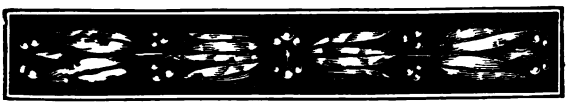
What a summer that had been to Llewellyn!

Lady Mary's quiet country home was but half an hour's ride from his own, and the glory of "Love's young dream" had been theirs in all its fulness and sweetness. Early

morning rides across the many-coloured moors, golden afternoons dreamed away on the river banks, and soft grey evenings on the lonely sea-shore, while the waves sang their song of joy in harmony with the rest of creation.

"Oh, the beauty that is around us on every side," would Llewellyn exclaim at times; "and our eyes see but the half of it! Yet if the mists and clouds were swept away who could look upon it and live!"

And Victoria's brightened eyes and flushed cheek would give back all the answer he needed, a look of perfect love, of truest sympathy, and, as he read it, deepest reverence for God's world of beauty!



CHAPTER IV.

"A SEER of visions, a dreamer of dreams." This had been Max Trego's verdict on his friend and old school-fellow. How indeed could it have been otherwise with him? Born with the artist's soul, his eyes, ears, and every sense and faculty ministered to its necessities, and found food for its life in the world about him.

Every turn in his path, every circumstance in his education had fostered and nourished his artistic tastes and sympathies, and it was with him but a question of length of life, study and experience, as to the degree of perfection

to which these tastes and sympathies would attain. As yet no one branch of art had captivated his fancy to the exclusion of any other. The idea of the oneness and indivisibility of art had so taken possession of his soul, that it mattered but little to him whether its outward form of expression were in beauty of colouring, perfection of outline, harmony of sound, or high poetic imagery. "Art is one" had become to him an article of faith and religious belief, and all outward forms of expression were to his mind but true and genuine so far as they possessed the one Divine attribute of creative power. "I believe in God the Creator," was the form his religious opinions took in those days. Whether it was that his religious creed had taught him his worship of art, or that art itself had been the ladder upon which he had mounted

to the foot of the Creator's throne, he knew not. "Man is an artist only so far as he possesses the Divine attribute of creative power," he had been wont to say, and this creative power was strong within him now, so strong indeed that all outward circumstances must bend and yield to it; all that seemed chaos to other minds to him furnished materials for a new world, in which he lived and moved, and had his being.

And this world was a world of beauty.

Then, too, his surroundings from his earliest infancy had been singularly favourable to the development of his love for art. No harsh, bleak wind of poverty or necessity had ever recalled him to the realities and bitternesses of life.

His father, an Indian officer, had died while he and his twin brother were but infants, his

mother had survived her husband but a few days, and in dying had committed her sons to the charge of her only brother, Sir Geoffrey Colet, of Castle Mount, Cornwall. Here, in the very lap of luxury and refinement, Llewellyn and Archibald had been reared. Archie's fate had been sad enough, and a deep grief to his brother and uncle. There was, however, no bitterness in his loss, no sting to remain in after years; as Llewellyn recalled his early boyish days, this, his first and only sorrow, served but to heighten and deepen his reverence and love for all beauty and goodness, past and present. "I shall find him again somewhere somehow," had been his boyish belief and hope, as he kissed the cold white face in its purple coffin, and now in the mid-day of his strength and manhood, the white face was as distinct and clear

in his memory as when he said his last good-bye to it.

"Come in what guise you will, little Archie, in this world or in any other, I shall know you again, and renew our old love."

Castle Mount is one of the oldest of our old British castles, and takes its name from a ruin whose site is still marked out within the castle gardens, and is said to be of the Arthurian era. The comparatively modern building must have been all but rebuilt towards the close of the sixteenth century, and again enlarged and restored in the seventeenth. A succession of Sir Geoffrey Colets had invariably spent large sums of money in repairing and keeping in order their splendid home of which they were justly proud, and the present Sir Geoffrey was in no way behind his predecessors. The natural

beauties of its situation are very great, and neither taste nor wealth have been wanting to render these beauties if possible more apparent, to deepen and heighten the wonderful effects of rock and sea, woodland and moorland in one glorious landscape. Here, on the western side of the house, the grounds had been positively bared of tree and shrub that nothing should mar the view of the grand brown desolate rocks which jutted out boldly on either side of a narrow gorge, where at high tide the sea surged and beat at will; there, on the northern side, the woodland of Scotch firs and Corsican pines had been carefully planted and preserved in order to throw into more perfect contrast the rich yellow and purple of the gorse and heather of the moorland, which filled up the rest of the picture.

The interior of the house was simply

perfect. Luxury, comfort, refinement, and taste showed itself on every side. Some of the richest treasures of art were there in profusion ; pictures and sculpture, Dresden and Sevres, each with a history of its own, handed down from generation to generation, and over which nations had quarrelled in auction rooms and palaces. This was the home in which Llewellyn had been reared. His education had been conducted on the same principles of refinement and lavishness. Every art, every science had been thoroughly cultivated, each at its own centre and fountain head. A few years at Rugby, where he had met and formed a friendship with Max Trego, had been succeeded by a five years residence at Oxford, that again followed by another five years in the chief capitals of Europe.

Now at twenty-eight years of age, his uncle

looked him in the face, and felt he could be proud of the man he had helped to form and educate.

"Your place must be here soon, Llewellyn," he had said, "for the cares of Castle Mount are almost too much for me, and I feel I need time for rest and reflection."

Glad indeed had been Sir Geoffrey when Llewellyn had brought to him the Lady Victoria Cathrow, and introduced her as his promised wife.

"In all England you could not have found one more worthy. Any other choice must have been a wrong one," he added, with old-fashioned politeness; for Sir Geoffrey was not of his age and generation, he belonged altogether to the past, and in language and literature he was a very Bolingbroke, and in manners and deportment altogether a Chesterfield.

Often and often Llewellyn would wonder how it was that although he had lived so many years in such close companionship with his uncle, he knew so little of his real life and innermost being.

"Why does he so hedge himself in with an obsolete mannerism? Does he use it as a weapon of defence to keep men from fathoming his real self? Has he always lived the life he is now leading, of study and reserve? Has he at any time suffered a great wrong, or perhaps done one?" These and many more such questions would pass through his mind as he noted at times the heavy cloud, it might be remorse, or it might be of pain, deepen on Sir Geoffrey's face, and the fits of abstraction and musing, as he grew older, become more and more frequent.

All attempts, however, to win his confidence

proved fruitless. If Llewellyn met him in the morning with an inquiring look at his anxious worn face, telling of a sleepless night, or made some inquiry after his health, he was waved on one side with an epigram or *bon mot* of the past generation, very neat, very suave, but spoken with an emphasis and tone which said as plainly as words could speak, "between you and me there is a great gulf fixed, let no man seek to bridge it over."

CHAPTER V.

AT this time a strange thing happened to Anna. Near her home by the river-side, there stood an old church, with a quaint, railed-in grave-yard round it. A church rich in monuments and brasses, and low arched chapels, where the Tudors had worshipped, and fair young Lady Jane Grey had knelt side by side with Lord Guildford Dudley to partake of the Lord's Supper. Here, in the gloaming, Anna loved to come. There was a dark corner in one of the chapels, Sir Thomas More's, so they said, where she could kneel and pray unobserved, dream her

own dreams, and think her own thoughts. The past reined supreme in this old-world sanctuary, and the dead lying beneath held empire still.

Thither, one hot July evening, Anna had crept. The day had been oppressive, the air seemed charged with electricity, and the streets more than ever crowded, dusty, and noisy. Anna was glad to seek refuge in her cool, quiet corner, and was long kneeling, praying or dreaming, for her prayers and her dreams seemed one in those days. As she rose from her knees, a deep sigh attracted her attention, and for the first time she became aware that a thin, squalid woman was standing at her side, and that her large, glittering black eyes were fixed full on her face. Such eyes she had never seen before, so large, so bright and wandering, and with such a

look of terror and suffering shining out of them that Anna shivered as though struck by the east wind, and, hastily passing the woman, left the church.

The woman followed.

When Anna reached her door, she turned to look with a feeling of fascination, as though the black eyes were fixed on her still, and there, on the other side of the way, stood the woman, with her back to one of the old elms which shadowed the river. At first Anna thought she would cross the road and speak to her, but something of terror, something of instinct withheld her, and she hastily entered the house.

The next day, Anna spoke of the woman to Max. He seemed very much disturbed.

"What nonsense, Anna," he said almost roughly. "It must have been your fancy.

Why should a woman follow you through the streets? With large black eyes did you say? The truth is, you must give up going out by yourself if this is to be the result. Why cannot you say your prayers quietly in your own room, instead of finding out these old worm-eaten churches?"

He seemed altogether so annoyed and angry that Anna did not finish her story and tell him how that, long past midnight, when, after laying down a favourite volume she had carried up to her room for quiet enjoyment, she threw open her window to look her last at the summer moon spreading weird shadows over the broad river, that there leaning yet against the tree so dark, so still, she could scarcely trace her outline, stood the woman with the wandering, glittering black eyes.

CHAPTER VI.

"COME back with me to Castle Mount for our fête day," Llewellyn had written to Max from his club, but Max, with fever-stricken patients, and a hundred other cares on his broad shoulders, had been too busy to reply, and the letter had lain unanswered.

So Llewellyn went over to the old river-side house to ask for a yes or a no.

The weather was sultry in the extreme; every door and every window had been set open to catch what little air there might be. Llewellyn entered unquestioned and walked

straight to Max's study, knowing it was the time he received patients. Max, however, had been unexpectedly summoned from home, and the study was empty. He next turned to the dining-room, thinking, possibly, he might find Mrs. Trego there. That room was alike deserted, so he proceeded to make his way to the drawing-room, where, in the old days, he had always been welcomed, before Max's peculiar wish to seclude Anna from the whole of mankind had developed itself.

In this room, hanging over Anna's piano, was an old picture (some said a copy of a Correggio) of the angel Gabriel appearing to the prophet Daniel. So old, indeed, and overlaid with dirt and the varnish of some mischievous picture "restorer," that only the face of the angel and part of the Prophet's

once gaily-tinted robe were distinguishable. In front of this, Anna had placed her easel, and the face of the angel, bright with its Divine message, was gradually growing under her touch.

Absorbed in her work, she had not heard the door open, nor Llewellyn's footstep on the floor. She had retreated a few paces in order to catch the picture in a better light, and, standing with her head slightly thrown back, her large, wide-open eyes, the pale, cream-coloured skin, and her graceful rounded arms raised and resting with clasped hands on her head, in pose and colour she herself presented a perfect study for sculptor or painter.

Llewellyn stood transfixed.

Since he had last seen her, a wonderful change had passed over her. He remembered

her in her infancy as a sweet, round little cherub, trustful and tender to every living thing. Anon the cherub had developed into a silent, gentle, sedate little damsel, of twelve or fourteen, with long, straight black hair and tiny mouth and chin. But the Anna of to-day! The embodiment of fresh unconscious girlhood, with the perfectly developed outline and loveliness of colouring as she stood before him thus, might have been a very Canova in the stillness and perfection of her pose, or a Titian in the harmony and richness of her colouring. Never again in all the meetings they were to have did Llewellyn see Anna with quite the same eyes. Perhaps, in after days, she may have gained in dignity, in firmness, in fire even, but something in colour she lost, something of freshness was gone, and the Anna, with the angel Gabriel

on her canvas, resting from her work on that hot July morning, never came back again.

But another step is on the stairs. A heavy one, and Max's voice growling tremendously is heard.

"What folly is this, leaving windows and doors open in this way in the heart of London!" The drawing-room door is thrown back impetuously, "Llewellyn—Anna," he exclaims, and for the first time Anna is conscious of Llewellyn's presence. With real pleasure she advances to meet him, with real pleasure she takes his offered hand.

"After all these months," she begins, but Max's scowling, angry face stops her.

"I thought you knew my rooms, Llewellyn," he remarks in a freezing tone. "I am glad to see a little more animation in your face! You seemed petrified, transfixed when I came in, as though you believed in

the existence of angels or goddesses," this with an irritating, satirical smile on his lips.

Llewellyn turns round and looks him full in the face. "I believe in the resurrection of the dead, Max," he replies quietly. "When I saw your sister a few minutes ago standing thus," he clasps his hands and rests them on his head, "in Archie's favourite attitude, when I saw Archie's look in her eyes and smile on her lips, I had but one thought in my mind. This, on my honour, Max."

Max laughs outright, a harsh, unpleasant laugh. "This is too much; don't, for heaven's sake, bring your wild, fantastic notions here. Put them into poetry, make a romance of them, but don't expect me to believe such utter nonsense."

Llewellyn's face flushes a deep red. Anna looks in amazement from one to the other.

"What is it," she begins, but Max will not let her speak.

"Come into my room, Llewellyn, I cannot speak to you here," he says, calming himself with an effort, and Llewellyn, bowing low to Anna, as though she were a princess, follows him out of the room.

"What have I done?" thinks Anna, "what has he done to disturb Max in this way? How strangely he speaks, too. The resurrection of the dead, the dead coming back in this life." She turns to her canvas again. "Ah, this is not half so beautiful as he is now," looking down on her angel's face, which has some far away likeness to Llewellyn's fair handsome features. "This is the angel when he came among men, but his face is that of the angel's when he stood in the presence of God!"

CHAPTER VII.

"Maximilian Trego to Llewellyn March.

"Cheyne Walk,

"Chelsea.

"AFTER what occurred yesterday, I feel that some sort of an explanation is due to you. Don't mistake me. I am not going down on my knees to beg your pardon, for the chances are if you were again to enter my house in the unceremonious manner in which you did yesterday, I should behave in precisely the same way.

"Nevertheless, I feel, after our years of friendship, that it is due to you to offer some reason for my want of courtesy, and the hot, angry words I addressed to you, and which, no doubt, appeared to you utterly uncalled for by the slight mistake you had made.

"I have thought long over the matter, debating in my own mind whether I should be justified in confiding to you a secret I am bound in honour to preserve by every means in my power, and have at last come to the conclusion that I can trust your honour as I can trust my own, and can rely upon you never at any future time to reveal what I am about to communicate, that is, of course, without my express permission.

"I enclose a MS. I wrote out a few nights since, and no doubt you will be greatly surprised at its contents.

"Latterly I have felt that the facts therein contained ought to be committed to the charge of some conscientious, right-minded person, but had no idea that the necessity for doing so would arise so soon. Among all my friends and acquaintances I know of no one to whose honour and conscience I could so entirely trust as to your own. This I say not to flatter you, but as a simple statement of a simple fact.

"At one time I had strong and special objections to confiding these things to your knowledge. Of late, however, I have begun to see matters in a new light, and feel that you (for reasons which will appear to you as you read the manuscript) are the one person to whom these things ought to be made known.

"And now for the promised explanation.

"It can be given in five little words—*Anna is not my sister.*

"Does this put my conduct of yesterday in a different light, and give a hidden motive to my hot words and all-but insolence to you? Can you not see the difficult position in which I stand with regard to Anna? How can I withhold the secret of her birth from her and at the same time win the love at her hands I have sought through so many long years? And how can I tell her young pure heart such a story as that you will read in the manuscript, and fill it with shame and doubt and the knowledge of evil? Can you not see how miserably complicated the whole affair is, and what a hard battle I shall have to fight my way out of it?

"Llewellyn! Llewellyn! do not you at any rate come between me and my darling!

Let me alone to win the love I would lay down my life to gain. You, with your easy conquests over women's hearts, your wealth of this world's goods, your great beauty and wonderful talents, cannot in your remotest imagination conceive what this girl is to me. For eighteen years (her whole life) her comfort and happiness have been my one thought and care. In hardest toil, privation, aye, and sometimes even of want, my one bright thought has been Anna and only Anna. My one hope, that has given me strength and courage, and carried me over my many difficulties, the possibility, that after years of patience, of waiting and devotion, I may perhaps call her my own at last.

"Your old Friend,

"MAX. TREGO."

"From Llewellyn March to Maximilian
"Trego.

"DEAR OLD MAX,

"The friendship of years is not to be broken by a few hasty words spoken, as yours so evidently were, under an erroneous impression. I grant, you were wonderfully cross-grained and hot-tempered, even for you, old Max, but you have been very much tried lately, and in more ways than I had any idea of.

"Your communication with regard to Anna has greatly surprised me. I must confess your conduct of late has been a great puzzle to me; but of course, in this fact lies the solution of the mystery, and your capriciousness and sensitiveness on all points in which Anna was concerned, can be readily understood and sympathised with.

"Your closely-written MS. I have not yet even glanced over, for the simple reason that your writing (never very good) now shows ample evidence that you have taken full possession of an M.D 's prerogative, and is absolutely undecipherable, except to those who have an immense reserve of time and patience at command, so for the present I have carefully sealed and locked it up. In a few days I shall have ample leisure for its perusal, but just now every hour of the day I am receiving painters, upholsterers, gardeners, musicians, and masters of all sorts of ceremonies.

"You know, in two days from this, Sir Geoffrey will give his first *fête* in honour of Lady Victoria Cathrow, and it is our great wish that it should be in every way worthy of the occasion. I am superintending all details myself, even to the colour of the silk hang-

ings for walls and staircases. How I wish you could have been with us, Max! Castle Mount I will undertake to say has never seen such a festival before, even in the old Baronial days of high feasting and revelry. Every *artiste* we have employed comes either from London, Paris, or Italy, and at the present moment not a corner of the old place remains undecorated. Every one who likes to come shall have a welcome. Not a villager far or near within fifty miles but shall have some happy remembrance of this day. I want every heart to be glad and rejoice with me in honour of my darling, my queen, my empress, the crown and joy of my life.

"But enough of this. Something else I have to say to you, old Max, even at the risk of setting you growling and snarling once more. First, let me assure you, on my word of

honour, that never once in all my intercourse with Anna has any thought of love for her, as you understand the term, entered my heart. And this I promise faithfully to you shall ever be the case. You may be successful or not, I cannot tell, in your attempt to win her; but come what may, your cause will be mine. I think you know me well enough to be able to trust to my loyalty to you, and to believe me when I say the only love I can ever by any possibility now, or at any future time, offer to Anna, is the love *that a brother bears to his sister.*

"And this love I cannot shut out from my heart.

"Do what I will I cannot exclude from my mind the conviction which daily and hourly, as I think over the matter, gains strength, viz., that Anna and Archie are one

and the same being. I expect you to laugh at this. I shouldn't recognise my matter-of-fact old friend unless he had a little flint and fire at hand to knock me down with. But what argument can you bring against it? You will say, naturally enough, that no man can prove a negative, and that having made a statement it devolves upon me to prove it.

"This I at once confess I cannot do.

"I can only show you the line of reasoning which has led me to adopt the belief that our souls only leave one body to take up their abode in another, and that in this self-same world of ours.

"The subject is vast, and utterly beyond the scope of the very commonplace letter I am sending you this morning.

"I can but give you a very brief summary of the grounds of my belief.

"They are as follows:—

"First, I believe in a perfect Creator.

"Secondly, I believe the design and end of this Creator in His work to be the ultimate perfection of every created being.

"Thirdly, I believe this end to be brought about by laws perfect in design and in operation, and which therefore cannot fail of attaining this end.

"I know you agree with me so far, for we have often discussed this matter together.

"Now, look around you in the world, or, if you will, turn back the page of History, take the wisest, noblest, purest, best man of any age or country; measure him by this standard of Divine perfection, and see how far he falls short of it. What then? Will you conclude that the design of the Creator in this and every similar case has failed and must be

abandoned, or that somewhere, somehow, the work will be carried on until complete. I think the latter would be the conclusion of every thinking mind.

"Then, I ask again, why should not the work of perfecting be carried on here in this world, expressly created for this purpose, and governed by laws having only this as their end? Other experiences, other surroundings may be necessary to carry on this work, to develop faculties and feelings in the man of which he is conscious he has but the germs. Cannot these experiences and surroundings be found here? The man may be fitted to start from a higher standing point, you will say? Cannot, I ask again, a higher standing point, moral, social, intellectual, be found for him here?

"Perhaps you will object to my theory

that it is subversive of morality, that if a man knew he would have another chance given him in this world he would be careless of his opportunities, indolent to exert his talents, and led to commit positive crime by the thought that in his next life he might atone for it.

"This notion I utterly repudiate.

"Your golden Heaven, with its harps, and palms, and crowns, is so utterly unlike anything in our experiences that no human being can realise it until he has worked himself into an unnatural state of ecstasy or hysteria. Your hell of material bodily torture is too low in fancy, too much beneath our present intellectual standing for any thinking mind to stoop to adopt. Consequently, neither futurity can to any great extent influence a man's life here.

"Let a man, however, once realise for a

positive certainty that by his daily, hourly life he is fixing the exact starting point from which he will commence in the next, that by his use or misuse of his opportunities and talents, so he is fitting himself for a high or low order of humanity—that the moment the breath goes out of his body he will go (as surely as Judas did) to his own place in this world, that is to say, to the place he has been all along fitting himself to fill; I say, let a man once realise all this to a positive certainty, and his life will daily and hourly be influenced by it, and it will take absolute possession of his whole being.

"The apparent indifference of the Creator in allowing, by His laws, human life to be so easily sacrificed by thousands and tens of thousands, as it is in earthquakes, famines, pestilences, and other casualties, is explained.

The terror of death and its awful mystery is gone, and the man is ready joyfully to lay down his life at any moment to serve the cause of goodness and truth.

"If you were a man of an imaginative temperament, I would ask you if at times an unknown face does not arouse in your mind a strange feeling of acquaintance and familiarity; a scene, a landscape you have never looked on before comes to you as a shadow of one you have seen elsewhere, and a voice or melody as an echo of one you have heard in another life?

"As, however, I know for a certainty the logical side of your character has been cultivated at the expense of the poetical, I will put none of these questions to you. Indeed, I don't doubt that the whole subject appears to you clothed in a halo of romance, and as

one of those far away possibilities scarcely worth the trouble of thought and discussion.

"So we will leave it, old Max.

"I do not suppose I have convinced you of aught save the simplicity and singleness of my feelings towards Anna, and the hearty good-will with which I wish you God-speed in your suit.

"Your old Friend,

"LLEWELLYN MARCH."

CHAPTER VIII.

NEVER before in all its annals had Castle Mount shone forth in such splendour. Never, since the days of the Plantagenets, had a festival been kept up with so much grandeur. It might have been a coronation celebration, for the magnificence and perfection of its details. The whole country side within fifty miles, was called upon to rejoice in honour of the Lady Victoria Cathrow.

Not one, from the highest to the lowest, of the crowds assembled in the Castle grounds, was there whose tastes had been forgotten,

and who could not find in the day's programme amusement and gratification exactly suited to his mind. For the poorest among the tenantry, the day began with a distribution of suitable gifts of clothing and books; for the children there was an unlimited supply of toys; for the young men there were sports of all kinds, running, wrestling, rowing and riding; for the young girls, croquet, archery, tennis and dancing. A banquet at noon for the peasants and fishermen, another at mid-afternoon for the higher class of tenantry, and a dinner in the evening to Sir Geoffrey's personal friends. The whole to conclude with a superb display of fireworks on the lake, and a ball commencing an hour before midnight.

The Castle grounds had been turned into a fairy land of brilliancy and beauty. The

old Castle itself, with its grey by-gone grandeur, had been decorated in princely mediæval style. Lady Victoria had been asked to name her favourite colour, and she had sent enclosed to Sir Geoffrey a tiny carnation leaf of rich cream tint. Llewellyn had sent on the same tiny leaf to Lyons, with orders to dye thousands of yards of silk to the exact shade, and the whole Castle, from basement to roof, had been carpeted and tapestried with that silk and cloth of gold. Cloth of gold and carnation silk hung from the battlements and, interspersed with the real flower and maiden hair ferns, decorated the ball-room walls.

Never had the July sun shone down upon a more brilliant and glowing scene; never had the old oaks and elms tossed their arms over a gayer or gladder throng; never had

Llewellyn March risen with a lighter heart or brighter hopes, than on this festival morning when he rode forth to meet his promised bride at the park gates; never, indeed, did knight ride forth to greet a fairer lady. "She is worthy to be a royal bride" thought Llewellyn, as he handed her from her carriage, and side by side they followed Sir Geoffrey and Lady Mary Cathrow through the various tents, and across the lawns where the day's sports had already begun. Then the feeling of exultation and pride, "she is all my own," thrilled in his heart, and he rendered her not only the admiration and homage of the artist, but the worship and devotion of a true-hearted lover.

And worthy indeed she seemed of both! Her features and figure were simply the perfection of refined and classic beauty.

Tall and slender, with small well-set head, surrounded with an aureola of pale golden hair, large tender grey eyes, and a skin so delicate in tint as to compare only with the inner shades of some rare shell of the Indian ocean. Llewellyn March with all his broad acres and vast fortune might well be proud of such a promised bride. "They are worthy of each other," was the comment of the crowds among whom they passed, as they gazed on the heir and the future queen of Castle Mount.

The day wore away. The noon-day sun began to grow oppressive, and the visitors were glad to take refuge in the shaded arbours and well appointed tents, which had been provided for their accommodation. "No one is to be turned from the gates," had been Llewellyn's orders, and up to a

late hour in the afternoon the people still thronged into the grounds.

It was a hard day's work for Llewellyn and Victoria. From one tent to another, from one banquet to another, welcoming all, kindly and gracious to each in turn, it was not until the day was closing in that they found time to return to the Castle to receive their own personal friends.

"Sir Geoffrey seems almost worn out," said Victoria kindly, looking across the room towards the Baronet, who was leaning back on a sofa with a white face and an old tired look about the eyes.

"Can some one sing something to pass a few minutes away?" asked Llewellyn, coming in from the lawn through one of the French windows.

"Can you ask such a question with the

Queen of Song by your side?" exclaimed Sir Geoffrey, rising with old-fashioned gallantry to conduct Victoria to the piano. Then he left the room, giving some order to one of the serving men; the only words which reached Llewellyn's ear were—

"Tell Newton without fail, at half-past eleven to-night."

"Do you know the old 'Douglas' song?" asked Llewellyn, bending over the piano; "strange to say a wandering street minstrel the other day made so great an impression on me with the old Scotch ballad, that I have been craving to hear it ever since."

"Only this arrangement!" answers Victoria, and she commences singing; her voice, a soft low contralto, is exactly suited to the quaint minor melody, and the words catch a new charm from her perfect rendering.

"Sir Geoffrey wishes to speak to you, sir," whispers a man at Llewellyn's elbow, and Llewellyn quickly leaves the drawing-room, to find Sir Geoffrey waiting in the corridor with a face as white as the marble pillar against which he leans.

"Stop that song Llewellyn," he says, in a voice trembling with suppressed emotion, "why must you have music?"

"O, to call back the days that are not,"

And Victoria's mournful notes float through the half open door.

"Stop that song Llewellyn," and the old man almost staggered forward. Llewellyn amazed, finds an arm-chair for him, and then returns to the drawing-room.

"End the song with the verse, love," he whispers in Victoria's ear, "I want to talk to you."

He turns to go back to Sir Geoffrey, but some guests are entering, and he is compelled to stand back and receive them. One arrival follows another, and it is ten minutes before he can reach the door.

As he is about to leave the room, a door at the opposite corner opens, and Sir Geoffrey, perfectly self-possessed, with no sign of emotion on his face, enters. In a few minutes dinner is announced, and Llewellyn has no opportunity of interrogating his uncle even with a look.

At an hour before midnight the ball began, and Llewellyn led Victoria the length of the wide, arched ball-room (it had been a famous banqueting-hall in the old days) to take the first place in the first quadrille.

Oh, the glory of that ball! The perfect music hidden away somewhere behind cur-

tains and flowers; the sweet scent of exotics coming in through the opened conservatory doors, and the lovely young figures in gauzy floating robes, swaying to and fro with the melody!

"'A wind-waved tulip-bed,'" said Llewellyn to Victoria some two hours after, as he led her from the heated room, to get a little fresh air, wrapping some soft warm cloak around her.

"Come away with me, love, to Arthur's Ruin, we shall get a splendid glimpse of the sea with this full clear moon."

Hand in hand they went. The yellow moon poured forth a flood of light from the clear deep blue sky, and the dark granite rocks stood out bare and bold over the calm silent sea, so calm and silent indeed, it seemed almost like some sleeping ocean in a land of

dreams. Hand in hand they climb the low mound on which stand the black uneven walls of Arthur's fortress. A rich faint scent comes from the woods of pine and box, and the sounds of the Castle music float down to them on the still night air. Hand in hand they turn their faces seaward, and their hearts go upwards in a glad hymn of praise and joy.

"You have made us all so happy, so happy to-day," murmurs Victoria, and her white dress floats out against the dark shadows of the ruin.

"The wonder, the perfectness, the glory of God's world, and God's laws!" is the doxology that goes up from Llewellyn's heart.

Truly he had made his own world. He lived in it, and it was a world of beauty!

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

A CLOUD passed over the yellow moon, a chill breeze came up from the sea; Victoria shivered. Some night-bird, far away, gave a shrill, plaintive cry, and here and there in the Castle grounds the lights began to die out.

"Let us go back, love," said Llewellyn. "You will take a chill. We have stayed too long."

They descend the mound, turn towards the house, and then pause in sudden amazement and terror.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

A CLOUD pas[illegible] moon, a [illegible] the sea; Victoria [illegible] bird, far away, rave [illegible] and here and there [illegible] lights began to be [illegible]

"Let us go [illegible]

"You will [illegible] long."

They [illegible] the house [illegible] ment and [illegible]

What strange, weird sound is this floating down to them in the silence of the night, startling the nested rooks, and waking an echo in the rugged cliffs? What is it? Whence comes it? From the rocks or the woods, or the deep sea itself? A solemn bell, that was all, sounding once, and dying away in distant echoes. They look in each other's faces.

"Come in, dearest," said Llewellyn. "It is the chapel bell, that is all. Come in; it can easily be explained, no doubt."

He passes his arm round Victoria's waist, for she trembles so violently she can scarcely walk.

A murmur comes up from the Castle, and here and there lights flash out from the dark walls.

"What is it? what can it be?" passes

from one to another, as the astonished guests crowd forth from the Hall.

The ball was at its height; the ladies looked their loveliest; the music grew more and more inspiriting; and fast and faster flew the feet of the dancers over the floor, when lo! deep and solemn, over all the sounds of mirth and revelry came the slow, mournful clang of a tolling bell.

The music ceased. The dancers paused; looked in each other's faces. A silence for a moment, then a sudden confusion, a surging and crowding together, and all felt the ball was at an end.

"Where is Sir Geoffrey?" was the murmur that rang through the throng, and Llewellyn, hastily resigning Victoria to the care of some friends, was one of the first to echo the question, thinking of his uncle's

white face and pitiful look, as he leaned against the marble pillar in the corridor.

But Sir Geoffrey is nowhere to be seen! Some seek him on the terrace, some in the library, some in the banqueting hall, but all without success.

Llewellyn takes a lamp from one of the side tables and makes straight for the Castle chapel.

It had been turned into an armoury in the days of the Cavaliers and Round-Heads, and had only within the last hundred years been re-converted into a chapel. It was built out a little from the Castle, and was reached by a long, low corridor, at the end of which a broad flight of stone steps led down into the chapel.

Swiftly, along the corridor, Llewellyn sped—

"Come with me, Wilson," he had called to the old butler, feeling assistance might be needed, but the old man could not keep pace with his young springing steps, to which a coming sense of evil lent extra speed. His feet echo along the stone passage; his lamp throws strange lights here and there on the knights in armour beneath the trophies on the wall.

One thought is in his mind—"I shall find him here;" one terror in his heart—"Will it be living or dead?"

There, at the foot of the stone steps, the old man lay. One arm raised above his head, and an old, grey, set look creeping over his features—a look which comes into a man's face but once in a lifetime.

High above his head Llewellyn raises the lamp, as he bends over the prostrate figure.

"Thank God! He breathes—he lives!"

He raises him in his arms. The eyes open and then close wearily; open once more, and rest, without any sign of recognition, on Llewellyn's face.

Then he mutters indistinctly some broken sentences.

"She cursed me once, she cursed me twice, she cursed me thrice." His eyes close again, as he whispers with a shudder, "Here in front of me, she passed like a ghost, her large black eyes—"

Then the whisperings cease, and he passes once more into a state of unconsciousness.

They bring Sir Geoffrey into the banqueting hall, and lay him on a couch.

The guests depart hurriedly and silently. The lights are put out, and Llewellyn, with old Wilson, a doctor, and Mr. Newton (Sir

Geoffrey's agent), take up their watch at the old man's side.

"A fit of apoplexy," had been the doctor's verdict. "I feared an attack. I was giving him medicine to ward it off."

But Llewellyn feels that there is something behind all this. Some mystery he cannot penetrate.

What, for instance, could Sir Geoffrey have been seeking in the chapel at that time of night? and, above all, who tolled the chapel bell?

"There is woe before us, sir," said old Wilson, whispering low to Llewellyn, as he held his uncle's white, cold hand in his. "Have you not heard how that twice before our family have been warned of death and disaster by the same bell tolling? Once, before the battle of Naseby, when Sir Gilbert

fell, fighting in the good cause, and again, a hundred years after, when young Edmund Colet, the heir, was found lying murdered in the woods."

But he is interrupted by a movement from the couch. Sir Geoffrey raises his head. Something of colour has come back to his face, and his voice, though strangely hollow and weak, has more of its old tone in it.

"Gentlemen," he begins, looking round him at the two or three standing there, his old-fashioned courtesy asserting itself even in death, "gentlemen, I must apologise for interrupting your ball in this manner; but there was something on my mind—something to be done. What was it—" he pauses; his strength is ebbing fast; his words are thick and slow. "Gentlemen," he raises his voice once more, and indicates Llewellyn by a feeble

movement of his right hand, "this is my only sister's only child, my nephew, Mr. Llewellyn March; but there are others who stand before him."

He pauses again, and now his voice is so low it only reaches Llewellyn's ear. "This Castle, these lands are not yours. Llewellyn, I trust to your honour."

His eyes are fixed for an instant with a sad, beseeching look, on Llewellyn's face. There is a feeble fluttering of breath, a convulsive twitching of the hands, and all is over.

Stunned and bewildered, Llewellyn bends over the old man.

There had been no time even to whisper one word of promise and assurance; no time to tell him he was safe in trusting to his honour.

But kneeling there by his uncle's side, Llewellyn registers a vow in his heart that the trust held out to him by the dead hand he will take up, and the quest pointed out he will follow through all mystery and difficulty, through all chances and changes, while life shall last.

CHAPTER II.

HOW the next ten days passed Llewellyn scarcely knew; his brain felt dulled and stupified, and he acted and spoke almost like one moving in a dream. The rapid succession of events, the mystery he felt ever in the background, the heavy load of responsibility so unexpectedly devolving upon him, he was at first utterly unable to realise to its fullest extent. It was not until Sir Geoffrey had been placed with due honour in the Castle Mausoleum, and the household had returned in some measure to its old routine, that his strong, young brain began to recover

its accustomed vigour, and he felt that some steps must be taken, and at once, to carry out Sir Geoffrey's last wishes.

But what were those last wishes?

"There are others who stand before you. This land is not yours."

The words were for ever ringing in his ears, and, puzzled and bewildered, he could scarcely see the right path in such a wilderness of doubt and difficulty. Only one thing stood out clearly and distinctly before him, and that was that he had no right whatever to take possession of his uncle's lands and property.

But to whom should he relinquish them? How resign the responsibilities and duties devolving upon him as one of the largest landowners in the county? His uncle's words, to his mind, implied a marriage of

some sort, and a child or children living somewhere. But how to discover this? To make the matter public by advertisement, or otherwise, would be simply to open a door to a crowd of impostors and schemers, and invite a succession of law-suits probably extending over the next twenty years. The first thing he felt ought to be done would be to consult with those who, with him, had heard his uncle's last words and wishes. He remembered (the words came back to him distinctly) Sir Geoffrey's order to one of the men on the day of the festival, "tell Newton at half-past eleven to-night," and he had accordingly spoken on this matter to Mr. Newton.

Newton readily told him all he knew.

"I met Sir Geoffrey," he said, "by appointment, in his study, at half-past eleven

on the night of the ball. He seemed a little agitated and thoughtful, and as though something were troubling him. 'Newton,' he said, 'I want you to make a new will for me; there is something I particularly want done.' I, of course, expressed my readiness to take his orders at once. 'Not now,' he said, thoughtfully. 'I am not quite prepared, but to-morrow morning at ten, without fail.' Then he left me looking, I thought, very tired and worried; but this I attributed to the fatigue he had gone through with the day's festivities."

"Another will!" repeats Llewellyn. "A special alteration to be made in the old one, and something to be done before that alteration can be made! In the midst of receiving visitors he makes this appointment, and, evidently, to prepare for this appointment,

leaves the ball at its very height, and goes all alone, and secretly, to the chapel! Mr. Newton, you know more about these things than I do; you, too, knew my uncle before I was born. Tell me what meaning do his dying words, coupled with his words to you and his quiet visit to the chapel, convey to your mind?"

"Well, sir, I scarcely like to put my own ideas into words on the matter," replies Mr. Newton, very slowly; "but if they had been spoken by any one else—by one of my former clients, say—I should have imagined at once that some secret marriage had been contracted, and afterwards ignored; that possibly fear of sudden illness or death had arisen in his mind, and had created a desire to right some one wronged, by acknowledging this marriage, and that it was necessary to collect

evidence or facts of some sort before this could be done."

Mr. Newton had been, in early life, a London lawyer in large practice, which he had resigned in order to take sole charge of Sir Geoffrey's affairs. His words carry conviction with them to Llewellyn's mind.

"This, or something like it, was my own thought," he says. "Nevertheless, why go to the chapel at all? You surely could have taken his order from his own lips, for he evidently intended taking you into his confidence, and could have collected and arranged any necessary evidence."

"It was to save time, no doubt, Mr. March," replies Newton. "Sir Geoffrey, I should imagine, must have felt in his own mind this attack, or some similar one, threatened, and was evidently fearful lest it might overtake

him before this final act of reparation could be made."

Llewellyn makes no reply. As yet he has told no one of the frightful suspicion flashing through his own mind, that some one else, beside Sir Geoffrey, was in the chapel on that terrible night, nor of Sir Geoffrey's muttered words, and the look of terror that passed over his face as he spoke them.

"Will it be any use going through the chapel," he says, half aloud. "Can there by any possibility be any secret place or cupboard for papers there which my uncle may have made use of?"

"Mr. March," says Newton, in an agitated tone of voice, "pardon me, but do you see whither your inquiries tend? Are you aware that by instituting a search and inquiry of this kind you are virtually seeking to dis-

inherit yourself? Do you know that if evidence of such a marriage could be found, you will draw not one farthing from the estate? Some two months since Sir Geoffrey removed his will from my custody, and, I much fear, has destroyed it, for not a vestige of it can be found among any of his private papers!"

"Yes, I know all that," says Llewellyn, quietly, "but I don't see what it has to do with the matter."

"You don't see, sir?" pursues the lawyer. "Great heavens, you don't mean to tell me you are actually thinking of giving up your inheritance to some unknown person or persons who may turn out to be totally unfitted for so high a position, and such heavy responsibility?"

"I am not only thinking of doing so, Newton," answers Llewellyn, in a still quieter

tone, "but it is what I thoroughly intend to do. I am trying to find out the best way of resigning my responsibilities, and how to discover, most satisfactorily, my uncle's real heirs."

Newton says no more. He shakes his head slowly and sadly; then resting his chin on his hand, remains absorbed in thought.

Llewellyn lays his hand on his shoulder.

"My dear, kind old friend," he says, "do not trouble in this way about me. I know exactly what you are thinking at the present moment. You imagine because I have been brought up in wealth and luxury, therefore I must be unfitted to stand the world's rough usage; because my tastes have led me to devote myself to art and literature, therefore I must be idle and effeminate. Believe me, it is not so. A man reared and cultured, as

I have been, surely starts in life from a higher vantage ground than his fellows. His senses are keener, his faculties more fully aroused, and his eyes are opened to see and take in, not only the small spot of earth on which he stands, but the whole wide universe."

"Mr. March," interrupts Newton, "we will not speak in generalities. Let me ask you one question; you must not think me impertinent in doing so. You know I was your uncle's most trusted adviser, and your own oldest friend, may I say, sir. Let me ask you, are you sure your eyes are opened to see the world around you? You see *a* world, I will not deny, but do you see the world in which we live and breathe, or some other? You have not seen—do not know the hollowness and falsehood of men, as I have seen and known it. A high purpose, such as you

have, truthfulness of character, cultivated talent and intellect, do not mean success in life. On the contrary, they as often as not are the cause of defeat and failure. Could you stand this, sir, let me ask you? You do not know what defeat and failure mean—you whose life has been one long course of brilliant successes. It means this, Mr. March. Men and women, the highest and most thought of in the land, turning their backs on you; could you bear this, sir? It means hard fare and hard work. Could you bear that, sir? And no books, no art, no science, no time for the luxury or refinements of life. Could you bear that, sir?"

"I hope I could, Newton, if I were called upon to do so," replies Llewellyn, calmly, "but at present I don't see the necessity of contemplating such a possibility. Don't mis-

take my meaning; I thank you very much for holding up before me the dark side of the picture. One cannot expect to have sunshine all the days of one's life, and it is just possible I may have had my all of bright weather."

"I did not say that, Mr. March; God forbid. But such a fortune and estates as these cannot be given up without deep thought and serious deliberation. Have you considered, sir, how the matter affects others besides yourself? Pardon me, if I allude to the Lady Victoria Cathrow by name. It is possible she may look upon such a sacrifice in a different light to what you do, and she may hesitate to fulfil to a man, without friends or fortune, the promise she made to the wealthy, much sought-after Llewellyn March."

And now Llewellyn cannot suppress the joyous confident smile that shines out

from his eyes and spreads itself over every feature.

"Don't trouble yourself on that score, Newton. I only wish I could feel half as confident on other matters as I do on this. Of course you cannot know the perfect confidence, the oneness of thought and feeling there is between Lady Victoria Cathrow and myself. No power on earth could make me doubt her absolute trust in me, and her faithfulness to her promises. No, no, Newton, other troubles I may have to face, but not this. One thing, and one thing only, troubles me;" his bright face clouds again, and there is a hesitation in his voice. "I know I can trust you with my difficulty; indeed, I need your advice much on this matter, and it is of no use giving a half-confidence; but I dread, I have a positive terror of the disclosures

that may follow—I mean with regard to my uncle's memory."

He looks up earnestly and wistfully in Newton's face, hoping and praying for a word of contradiction. Newton says nothing.

"It is all so dark, so complicated," Llewellyn goes on, "one can't see a step before one. The only thing that seems to stand out clearly to my mind is the positive duty to seek out the true heir."

Again he pauses, but Newton makes no reply.

"Ah, you think it useless, I see, to discuss the matter with an obstinate man! My poor uncle, five minutes more of life would have prevented all this difficulty and mystery! Well, Newton, at least you will stand by me whatever act of folly you may think I am committing. I may trust to you so far?"

"You may count on me to my last breath, Mr. Llewellyn, and I will make no further attempt to reason you out of your notions, for I see it is useless. For thirty years I served your uncle faithfully and guarded his interests, God forbid that I should fail you in your need."

Llewellyn looks up gratefully, and takes the old man's hand.

"I know you don't want thanks, Newton, so I won't offer them. Let us begin our work at once. I want to go over the chapel; come with me, and let us see if there is any hiding-place there that will help us out of our difficulties."

They go at once to the chapel. Newton suggests the advisability of a mason, or some working builder, going with them to sound the walls and flooring.

"He would find out more in five minutes than we should in as many hours," he argues, and Llewellyn, recollecting a man he had had from London, and who was occupied at that moment in superintending the removal of the festival decorations, gives orders that he should be sent for to meet them in the chapel.

The chapel, small compared with the salons and halls of the old Castle, had been the place of worship for the Colet's for centuries, long before the need of the first James had conferred the patent of a baronetcy on the family. Each generation had left its mark on the place. There were tablets and brasses commemorating the doing and dying of Colets who had, as knights and barons, done doughty deeds in the feudal ages. There were tiny chapels cut and carved

curiously, some with the roses and broom of the Plantagenets, others with the Welsh harp.

One Sir Geoffrey, a warlike heathen in tastes and ideas, had converted the place into an armoury, and as such it had remained for a hundred years or so, until a more gentle and cultivated successor, transferring the arms and trophies to the adjoining stone gallery, and renovating the memorials of his ancestors, had restored the place to its original purpose. It had, however, been left to the last Sir Geoffrey to add to it those finishing touches which a lover of art alone knows how to bestow; and he had spared neither wealth nor pains in the work.

A painted glass window, in rich subdued tints, shed a soft sun-set light over the altar piece (a Perugino for which Sir Geoffrey had

contended with the crowned heads of Europe) and the exquisitely wrought Venetian screen which separated the choir from the nave. Drooping over this on either side hung the flags and standards taken in battle by old knights and barons. Eastern lamps, each with a history, swung from the richly-carved and painted ceiling, and pavement in Roman mosaic led from the sculptured porch to the altar steps, where the soft colours of a Turkey carpet blended admirably with the crimson and purple of the velvet cushions.

Llewellyn gazed long and silently around on his uncle's work. A vast feeling of pity took possession of him. "With such culture, such aspirations, such a life at his command, to be so utterly wrecked," was his thought.

Sir Geoffrey was not the man to win, even

had he sought to do so, much love or sympathy from those around him; but Llewellyn would have been scarcely human had he not been conscious of some bond existing between himself and the one who had nurtured him so many years, and with whose tastes, at any rate, he had so much sympathy.

"How will this matter end? Where will our search lead us?" flashed through his mind as he listened to the workman's hammer against the floor and wall. "Perhaps after all Newton is right, we may be unearthing some secret which had better be left buried and forgotten," he thought, as he followed the man down the aisle, Newton, at a little distance, bringing up the rear.

The man suddenly paused in his work and looked up at Llewellyn.

"Did I understand you right, sir, that

you were looking for some cupboard or secret place for books or papers?"

Llewellyn assented. "Have you found such a place yet?" he enquires.

"A hundred such, sir," replies the man; "if you want them searched, we may as well pull the chapel down at once. The walls are full of holes of all kinds, where treasures may have been hidden at one time. Even the floor we are walking on, sir, has galleries underneath."

"Yes, I know that," answers Llewellyn, "there is a subway under here that led, at one time, into the old prisons of the Castle. We had it stopped, however, it afforded such famous harbour room for the rats. But the chapel—I had no idea there were any such hiding-places to be found here!"

"You see, sir," the man goes on, "this

place has been very much altered and pulled about. There were probably deep recesses in this corner," he sounds the wall with his hammer as he speaks, "perhaps they led down to the same subway. Any how, some one, for some purpose or other, has thrown up a wall in front of them, instead of bricking them in as they should have been, if no longer required."

"Yes," says Llewellyn, "but that must have been done many years ago. What we are now looking for is a place in which books or papers could be deposited and withdrawn easily, opening with a spring or lock. Do you see any such place here?"

The man shakes his head. "There is very little brick or stone here, sir, that has not been undisturbed for at least a hundred years, with the exception of the pavement

and altar steps, which I had the pleasure of placing, under the late Sir Geoffrey's orders. Hiding-places there are in plenty, but I will undertake to say that they could not be got at without a pickaxe and a vast amount of trouble."

Llewellyn looks at Newton inquiringly.

"Give it up, Mr. March," he whispers. "There is no good to be got out of such a search. Leave it in the hands of Providence, sir. You have done your part. Give it up now."

Llewellyn turns to the man.

"I have no further orders to give you today," he says slowly, walking towards the door.

He takes out his purse to reward the man for his trouble, and in doing so accidentally drops some of the silver, which rolls hither

and thither on the pavement and out into the porch. The man picks up all he can see.

"Did you drop this, sir, at the same time?" he asks, handing Llewellyn a tiny, foreign-looking key, with curiously-cut wards.

Llewellyn looks at it earnestly.

"Thank you; I will take charge of it. Good morning."

He then turns to Newton.

"This must be what we want, Newton. Sir Geoffrey must have dropped this as he fell at the foot of the stairs. Half our work is done for us now. Come back with me into the chapel, there must be somewhere a lock which fits this key, and I shall take no rest till it is found."

"Ah, Mr. March, I think the devil himself must have brought it to you, just, too, as you were on the point of giving up the

search. Far better let the secret lie buried still. Take care when you unearth it, it does not turn out to be a family skeleton, and a very ugly one, too."

Llewellyn, on the point of re-entering the chapel, pauses.

"Let me see," he muses. "The man found this in the porch. Can there be any secret place there?"

He looks round the porch, which is small and circular, supported on pillars of Cornish serpentine, and lighted in the roof with a small round window of rich golden brown tint.

The light falls through this on to a wonderful group of sculpture, which stands in the exact centre, and which Sir Geoffrey had discovered some twenty years previously in an obscure shop in Florence. With his accu-

rate knowledge of art, he had at once set it down, and rightly, to be the work of a pupil of Verocchio, and most probably sold in some urgent need for money to a purchaser ignorant or doubtful of the value of his purchase.

It represented the adoration of the Magi. The Virgin, exquisitely moulded, formed the centre of the group, with the infant Christ in her arms. Right and left of her knelt the wise men displaying their gifts, and at her feet stood a curiously-fashioned Eastern casket.

Llewellyn leans against the group, thoughtfully.

"Somewhere here the man picked up the key, I think."

He looks up at the Virgin. The golden-brown light throws a glory on her tender face,

flecks her robe with quivering shadows, and seems to wake the silent group to life itself.

The infant Christ smiles down benignly, the wise men look up with wondering awe, and Llewellyn's easily-aroused imagination could fancy that in another instant they would arise from their knees and open the casket to present further treasures to their Divine king.

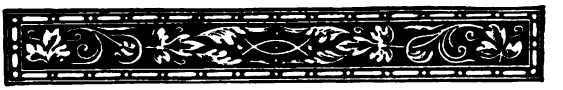
"Open the casket!" The thought flashes like lightning through his brain. "What if the casket really does open? What if this be the key I hold in my hand?"

In another moment he has mounted on the base of the pedestal, and bending low, with his face touching the Virgin's robe, he discovers, among the curious carving of the casket, a tiny hole, into which he instantly fits the newly-found key.

Newton draws near, breathlessly.

"What is it you have found, Mr. Llewellyn?" he asks. "Papers of any sort?"

"Only this, Newton," Llewellyn replies, in a low, disappointed tone, as he descends from the marble group, and holds out some printed paper to the old man. What is it? Only a leaf of a well-worn Bible, containing part of the eleventh chapter of the Gospel of St. John!



CHAPTER III.

"AS far off as ever from the truth," said Llewellyn to himself, the next morning, as he swung back the gate that led into Lady Mary Cathrow's pretty, though tiny, flower garden, and looked right and left across the gravel paths, thinking he might possibly see her somewhere among her flowers and shrubs, for he knew she was a most indefatigable gardener.

There she stood, among the roses, with broad-brimmed hat, and hands protected with thick gardening gloves, carefully nipping off the heads of the decayed flowers and gathering the full-blown buds.

Her face expressed kindly anxiety and solicitude, as she advanced to meet Llewellyn.

"We dared not have hoped to see you so soon," she said. "This is indeed kind. Victoria has gone into the village, but will soon return."

"I am very glad, for I wanted to beg for half an hour's quiet talk with you before seeing her. Can you give it me?" inquired Llewellyn, stooping to pick up her gloves and flower basket, and turning towards the house.

"You are taking it for granted," she replied with a pleasant smile. "Yes, better in the house; we shall be freer from interruptions."

She leads the way into a quiet little morning room, and seating herself in a low window-seat, waits for Llewellyn to begin.

"I have so much to say to you. There is so much you ought to know, Lady Mary," he begins, "that I was most anxious for this interview. Rumour travels fast, and I feared lest you might possibly hear from other lips what should come to you first from mine."

Lady Mary looks somewhat surprised, but simply bows assent.

Llewellyn goes on—

"The position in which I stand towards you justifies me in bestowing the fullest confidence, in relating facts connected with my uncle's death which otherwise I could not possibly have communicated."

Then he tells her simply, from beginning to end, all the details of the sad story. Sir Geoffrey's half-muttered words, as they found him lying in the corridor, and his dying utterances, heard only by Llewellyn's ear.

He passes over nothing. The search in the chapel he relates fully, and his own disappointment, when he thought himself on the verge of a discovery, to find only the leaf of an old Bible!

Lady Mary listens with perfect composure to his recital, then pauses for a moment before she commences—

"I do not think I quite follow you, Mr. March; it is an extraordinary story, but I fail to see how your present position is in any way affected by it."

Something in her words and tone send a chill to his heart. "It can be easily explained to you, Lady Mary," he replies, "my position at the present moment is simply this: I am no longer heir to my uncle's fortune and estates, and all my possessions in this world amount to some three hundred a year, which

I inherit through my mother;" he pauses, but as the lady makes no reply, he goes on—"these family matters are somewhat painful to discuss; my father was deeply in debt at one time of his life, and at her own request, a large portion of my mother's fortune was handed over to satisfy the claims of his creditors."

"Let me quite understand, Mr. March, is it your fixed intention not to take possession of Sir Geoffrey's estates to which in the eyes of the world you are justly entitled?"

"It is my fixed intention, Lady Mary, and beyond that, it is my fixed intention to use every means in my power to discover the real heir or heiress, which ever it may be."

"Then I suppose your object in coming to me this morning was to ask your release from your engagement to my niece?" she

enquires, in the same quiet, almost frigid tones.

Llewellyn starts: he is not prepared for such a question as this; relying on her friendship with the trustfulness of a loving nature, it had not for one moment occurred to him that Lady Mary Cathrow would see the matter, save with his eyes, after he had frankly and fully stated all the circumstances of the case to her.

Lady Mary goes on—"You cannot, I feel sure, ask or expect my niece to share with you the remnants of your mother's fortune, or to descend with you to that position in society which, for the future, it is your intention to occupy."

"No," said Llewellyn, partially recovering himself, "no such thoughts as these were in my mind; I would not ask Lady Victoria to

descend to any position in society inferior to the one she now occupies, I think you know me well enough to believe me so far. I came to you to-day, frankly to tell you the whole truth of the matter, and to ask for your concurrence in the plan of life I have marked out for myself in the future."

"And what is that plan of life, Mr. March, may I ask?"

"Certainly not to descend one single step from my present position, as your words would seem to imply. Do you suppose, Lady Mary, I should be willing to take a lower position in life than the one to which I am entitled by birth?" he continues, with the tone of a man not proud, but conscious of his own talents and powers of intellect. "On the contrary, I intend from this day forth to take a higher standing. Hitherto I have been an

idler, a *dilettante* if you will; I have, I fear, played at living and working, as a boy plays with the tools with which men build the cities of the world: now I must set to work in earnest, and concentrate thought and idea to one branch of art, and rise, I hope, as others have before me, to a far higher rank than any that mere fortune or birth can bestow. This I shall not be afraid to ask Victoria to share with me, and all I beg of you and of her to-day is to grant me a little time to reach so high a pinnacle—to wait a year or two, or three, it may be, while I am striving and working for the prizes which come without fail to those who have earned them, and which indeed are the only prizes worth striving and working for."

Lady Mary's face grows harder and colder. "You speak almost enigmatically, Mr. March.

As far as I can understand, you wish me to sanction the continuance of your engagement to my niece, while you are striving as an artist, or author, or musician, to gain fame and fortune."

Llewellyn bows assent.

"Listen to me now, if you please. You have spoken honestly and frankly to me, I will speak in the same way to you. When I was quite young —about Victoria's age—a great misfortune happened to me. I fell deeply in love with my father's chaplain. I do not wish to blame him; I suppose the hope of marrying a peer's daughter was too great a temptation for him to withstand. In any case he did not withstand it, but bound me over with all sorts of promises to wait for him, while he worked his way up to a

bishopric—he believed in his own powers, Mr. March, just as you believe in your's—the next best thing to an English bishopric was a Colonial one, he judged, and accordingly accepted the first offer that came to him in the way of Colonial promotion, viz., a chaplaincy on the west coast of Africa. For ten years I believed in his wonderful powers, and waited for his promotion, and then—" here a slight tremor in her voice—" he died. The best of my life had gone beyond recall, the best of my opportunities had slipped past, the best, freshest feelings of my heart were worn out, and I settled down into the passionless apathetic being you have known. Do you think, Mr. March, I would wish Victoria to live the life I have lived, to give her youth, her beauty, her freshness to a vision, a phantom, a delusion? I do not

attempt to criticise your conduct in this matter, I am perfectly willing to believe you are acting from a very high sense of duty; I must ask you to credit me with the same high motives, when I tell you that I cannot consent to have your engagement with my niece prolonged by one single day, and that I trust to your honour to at once release her from all promises she has made to you."

Llewellyn's face is white now, and his lips firmly set.

"I did not expect this, Lady Mary," he says, in a low tone. "You must pardon me if, in such a matter as this, I hesitate to accept your decision. Not only my life's happiness, but Victoria's is at stake. Only from her lips can I accept a decision of such moment to us both, only to her hands can I resign the claims which bind us each to the other."

"Very well then, Mr. March," said Lady Mary, rising, "let it be so. My niece, I trust, has been too well trained and taught to give any other answer than the one you have had from me. I cannot doubt what her decision will be."

"And I, too, Lady Mary, cannot doubt what her decision will be," replies Llewellyn, as he takes the lady's proferred hand, and bows his farewell.

Once more in the sweet fresh morning air he recovers his calmness and confidence. "My darling!" he exclaims, "my true hearted Victoria, I did wrong to doubt you for one moment—a promise, a love, a trust such as yours, is given for life, death, and eternity!"

CHAPTER IV.

VERY long and very earnest was the conversation between Lady Mary Cathrow and her niece on that day of Llewellyn's visit.

"He did well to come here and tell me frankly and honestly the true state of affairs; but in still pressing his suit upon you, he did not so well," argued the elder lady; "with all his acquirements, in some things he is as simple as a child. It does not seem to have occurred to him for a moment, as possible, that either you or I would see the matter with any other eyes than his own. Of course

the right thing would have been for him at once to have released you from your promises, supposing he is thoroughly in earnest in his resolution not to take possession of Sir Geoffrey's estate."

"But is it not possible his resolution may be shaken in that respect;" murmurs Victoria.

The room is darkened by the closed jalousies to keep out the July sunshine, but even in the shadow, her face stands out clear-cut and white, and a curious hard-set look has spread itself over mouth and chin, which brings out a latent resemblance to her aunt.

"I should not advise you to try it, Victoria," replies the aunt meaningly. "If you had seen the young man's look of determination, as he stood here talking to me an hour ago, you would feel how perfectly useless such an attempt would be. Besides,"

she added after a moment's reflection, "there is always this to be thought of: even supposing it possible to turn him from his purpose, there is the chance of these unknown claimants springing up at any time, and taking possession of their inheritance, or at least endeavouring to do so, and in any case it renders the position of Mr. March's wife far from desirable."

"If one only knew how to act for the best!" says Victoria, in a low unsteady voice.

"Ah! if one only knew that, it would end all life's difficulties at once. We cannot act for the best absolutely. We can only do what seems best to us, and indeed oftentimes the best is but the lesser of two evils," replies the aunt almost bitterly. "But," she continues, "there is no reason why you should not take your time in this matter—there is no

urgent necessity for you to see Mr. March for a day or two. Let it rest for to-day, send him a short note to prevent him coming over again, and tell him you must take time to consider your decision; it will be better to break your determination gradually to him."

Victoria makes no reply, she leans forward on her low chair, resting her temples on her hands. Lady Mary goes on—

"If you were a girl with simple tastes and ideas, Victoria, or even had a moderate fortune of your own, I should not endeavour to influence you in this matter; but you know you cannot, even with my help, make your small income cover your dress and visiting expenses. Twice this year I have had to pay bills of yours, and no doubt shall be called upon for more money before another three months is over. You must have your ponies,

your dresses from Paris; your maid, too, is extravagant enough to be a Princess of the blood-royal herself, and you tell me all these things are necessities to you."

Still no reply from Victoria, only the tiny foot beats impatiently on the floor, and she pushes her chair further into the dark recess.

"I have not the least doubt," pursues Lady Mary, "that if this engagement of yours were allowed to go on, the thing would wear itself out without any interference on my part, but as it wore itself out, it would wear you out also; your beauty, your temper, your youth, your brightness. Ah! there is no such test of love, as the weary waiting, year after year, which some are called upon to endure; some young foolish things, who sooner than give a man an hour's pain (believe me, Victoria, it doesn't last much

longer) bind themselves with all manner of promises which hang as weights and chains round their neck. It would need a stronger, harder nature than yours to stand such a strain as that."

Victoria pushes back her hair from her forehead, and lifts her flushed face, looking straight at her aunt.

"It would give Llewellyn much more than an hour's pain, if I threw him over. It would be a life-long sorrow to him."

"A life-long sorrow!" echoes the aunt. "That shows how little you know of men and their ways. 'Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love.' Depend upon it Victoria, in less than three months after your giving him up, he would be engaged to some wealthy heiress, who would prove a far more suitable wife to

a poor man than you, with your extravagant tastes and ideas."

Victoria starts to her feet.

"How hot and close this room is! It is positively stifling to sit here talking for hours."

She throws back the jalousie and steps out into the verandah. Lady Mary follows her.

"Yes," she says quietly, "this place is too hot at this time of year. It would be pleasant to have a little more fresh air, some more bracing sea-breezes. The Oldfields are at St. Leonards, so I heard this morning, and I think it would be very nice to join them there for a week or ten days."

Victoria flashes back an almost indignant look at her aunt, but the calm hard features do not relax a single muscle. She quietly takes up her morning's letters, which in the excitement of conversation have lain unread.

"One thing I beg of you, Victoria," she

says, "do prevent the young man coming here again to-day and making a scene, for my head will not stand a third argument such as this. Write to him kindly or crossly as you will, but make him understand he must keep away from the house for to-day at least."

That afternoon Llewellyn received a daintly written note in Victoria's hand—

"DEAREST LLEWELLYN, (so it ran)

"I am so bewildered by what I have just heard from Auntie of your difficulties and troubles, that I scarcely know how to write to you. Will you give me a quiet day to think over it all.

"I will write and tell you when you may come.

"Ever your own,

"VICTORIA."

And Llewellyn reads the first line, and the last line over and over again, perfectly satisfied, triumphant even, and whispers to his own heart how easy it is to fight life's battle, with love for a helmet and breastplate, and faith and hope for a shield and sword.

CHAPTER V.

LLEWELLYN was surprised at first not to find another little dainty note waiting for him on the next morning's breakfast table.

"But," he thought, "it will come without fail before the end of the day."

And meantime there was so much to be gone through and arranged. Papers to be set on one side, to be read at some future time; others to be sorted out for immediate perusal. A whole world of business to be gone through with Newton, a very fair amount with Sir Geoffrey's land steward, and, in addition, a

special interview to be granted to the Castle chaplain, who had somehow felt himself neglected and slighted—"not treated with sufficient confidence," he had phrased it, with regard to the sad circumstances attending Sir Geoffrey's death.

Llewellyn's mind was slowly recovering from the shock it had received, and he had begun to see things in a clearer light. He had resolved simply and steadfastly "to do what was right, in the difficult matter before him, nothing more."

And it is wonderful when a man sets his mind thus, how plain and straightforward the path of duty becomes.

He had no "head for business," he was quite willing to admit, but all matters of detail, he knew, could be safely entrusted to old Newton's care, who had had sole charge

of Sir Geoffrey's expenditure and investments for upwards of twenty years.

His first intention was to vacate the Castle as speedily as possible, thereby at once reducing the immense outlay and expenditure required to keep up so large an establishment.

"I have no right," he argued, "to spend one farthing of the heir's money more than is absolutely required to keep the whole property in perfect condition and repair."

The next step would be to constitute a committee of trustees, with Newton at their head, to administer the funds of the large estate, always allowing the yearly income to accumulate for the benefit of the future master of the Castle. There were old and trusted friends of Sir Geoffrey upon whom he knew he could rely to act in this capacity.

The third and last thing to be done would be to consult the best London lawyers who were to be had, and leave it in their hands to take what steps they might deem necessary for the discovery of Sir Geoffrey's heir or heirs.

"If I stir in the matter I shall be sure to make some irretrievable blunder, and double or treble the complications and difficulties," he reasoned, and wisely determined to sketch out a plan of the method of procedure as above, and leave it in the hands of Newton to carry out in all details.

This took some hours of thought and deliberation, for there were necessarily many things to be carefully weighed and considered in such a matter as this, and as he went on the work seemed to grow upon him.

It was work too to which he was totally

unaccustomed, and the thought forced itself upon him irresistibly, how utterly, childishly, ignorant he was of most matters of business, and how totally unversed in the knowledge of the absolute value of money. So he left wide gaps in his manuscript here and there, contenting himself with writing in the margin, "To be filled in by Newton as he thinks best." And an amused sort of feeling took possession of his mind as he thought of himself in London, or some other large capital, with a rigidly-defined income, although at the same time he found it simply an impossibility fully to realise the picture.

He laid down his pen, and wandered to his study window, and looked out on the glorious sea, swelling and surging against the brown granite rocks—the sea which had sung to him all sorts of wonderful songs from his earliest

boyhood—whose rush and roar had woke him in the dull dawn of furious winter mornings, and whose soft, low murmur had lulled him to sleep nightly in the golden summer-tide.

The sun was travelling down to the blue-green of the pines and firs, the rooks were cawing and flapping their broad wings in a lazy, well-bred style, and a bank of low clouds cast a deeper shade over the purple and golden brown of the distant moorland, and Llewellyn felt a sudden sharp pang—a stab, almost—as he thought of the farewell—the long good-bye—he must say to all these lovely sights and sounds.

"It will be a wrench," he thought. "Almost like giving up part of my own being, to be severed from this old home. Glad and thankful shall I be when it is done."

Still, his nature was so sanguine and joyous, so totally free from the remorse and bitterness which oftentimes attend such partings and severings, that the next moment he found himself wondering what his new life would be like, on what branch of art or literature he should concentrate his forces, and what triumphs the future would have in store for him.

"There must be a huge bonfire-making with all this litter and rubbish," he thought, running his eye over the study shelves and his many despatch-boxes, letter cases, and not too neatly-arranged drawers. "I should not be suited for secretarial duties of any kind, that is certain," he said aloud, as he stooped mechanically to push some letters into a half-shut drawer.

The drawer, however, was already more

than full, and the letters refused to be arranged.

Some thick paper underneath crumpled and crackled, and Llewellyn, drawing it out to refold and compress, recognised Max Trego's badly-written manuscript, which the hurry of subsequent events had completely obliterated from his memory.

"I ought to have run through this before," he thinks. "Max, no doubt, has been expecting to hear from me on the matter. I wonder what he will say when he hears of my intention to give up Castle Mount? What a comfort it would have been if I could have consulted him a little as to my new course of life, and could have taken up my abode with him for a time! But that, of course, is not to be thought of now."

He opens and spreads the manuscript on the

table before him. As he does so, the phrase in Max's irregular hand, catches his eye, "Sir Geoffrey Colet's only child."

Amazed, breathless almost, with astonishment, he turns the pages back, and reads on from the beginning, every nerve and faculty aroused and at full tension.

And this is what he reads—

"On the 14th of March, 1853, I, Maximilian Trego, had so strange an event happen to me that I deem it right it should be minutely recorded in writing, and committed to the care of some trustworthy person, as circumstances may arise at some future time to render such a record valuable and necessary.

"The date is fixed on my mind by the fact of its being the day on which Archibald March, Sir Geoffrey Colet's elder nephew and

heir was buried. I had been sent for in the morning to go over to Castle Mount to endeavour to amuse and comfort Archie's twin brother Llewellyn, who was almost inconsolable for the loss of his brother.

"It was nearly seven o'clock in the evening before I thought of returning home; there was then some little delay in bringing round my horse—my father's almost worn-out hack—and it must have been close upon eight o'clock before I started on my homeward ride. I had a good fourteen miles canter before me, and had rarely stayed so late at the Castle before; when once or twice I had done so Sir Geoffrey had invariably sent one of his own men home with me, for I was only a lad of fifteen, and the roads were rough and steep. On this occasion, however, he omitted doing so, Llewellyn had gone to bed literally

worn out with grief, and the whole household of the Castle seemed for the time so upset by the sudden and terrible death of the heir, that I think the doctor's son setting off alone, for his dark lonely ride, was scarcely noticed or thought of.

"My father at this time had been compelled to resign his practice on account of his failing health. He had gone with my mother and myself to the little fishing village of St. Quentin, where he hoped the soft warm air and perfect quiet might somewhat restore his strength.

"It was a late spring that year, and the snow had been lying on the ground for two or three days. The hedges were covered with it, and the roads slippery and bad. There was only a weak watery moon showing out, and large heavy clouds hung low,

threatening a second fall before morning. The first half of my ride passed off well. My hack having had a good day's rest, and a good feed, got along nimbly enough; too nimbly, in fact, for taking a sharp curve at the end of West Wheal lane, I with difficulty held him in from going right over some poor creature—a beggar woman apparently—who stood in the very middle of the road trying to attract my attention. I pulled him up, however, as well as I could, and thinking the woman to be some tramp or gipsy, asking for money, put my hand in my pocket to see if I could find a stray sixpence. As I did so she came close to my side, and although it was too dark to see her face, I could just make out that she held some sort of covered-up bundle in her arms, and that her clothes although thrown on in the oddest manner

possible, were certainly not those of a beggar or tramp. She commenced speaking in a low hurried voice, and with so broad a Scotch accent, that it sounded almost like a foreign tongue. The only words I could distinguish were 'Castle Mount;' so I concluded, and rightly, that she was asking her way thither. 'You are about seven miles from Castle Mount, you surely are not thinking of walking there to-night,' I said, wondering whence this strange unnative-looking being could have come, and what she could possibly want at the Castle. 'Which way must I go?' she asked, in weak quavering tones, which told me at once that she was either very tired or very ill. I pointed up the lane. 'My good woman,' I said, 'if you make for the Castle, you can't possibly get there before midnight, with the roads in this state, and no

moon to speak of. The whole household are in bed by eleven o'clock, and what will you do waiting outside in the cold till the morning?' She gave a weary sigh, and leaned her head against my old horse's sides, repeating slowly half to herself, 'Seven miles still, seven miles still to go!'

"I scarcely knew what to do nor how to advise the poor woman. There was no house nor shelter of any kind within another mile at least, nothing but bleak barren fields and steep rough lanes, and I could plainly see she was overdone as it was. 'Have you friends at Castle Mount?' I asked, thinking she might possibly know some of the servants of the household. She made no reply, did not seem to hear me even, and I began to fear she was falling into a swoon, when suddenly to my intense amazement, I heard the weak

wailing cry of a babe proceed from the bundle in her arms. 'You don't mean to say you have a baby there? why it will die before morning, if you don't get into some shelter,' I exclaimed, horror-stricken at the idea of an infant exposed to the bitter night air.

"Then she raised her head, and putting her hand on my horse's bridle, looked up at me. One feeble ray from the moon at that moment struggled through the snow clouds, and fell upon her face. I almost started back with terror at the weird haggard features it lighted up; what the rest of her face was like I do not recollect, but the large sorrowful black eyes which were looking straight into mine, I shall remember to my dying day. Burning, hungry, glittering eyes they were, more than human in their brilliancy and beauty, less than human in the wildness, the

dumb agony, and suffering which looked out of them.

"Then she spoke in the same hoarse, yet weak voice, 'Death is better than life,' she whispered, 'for life means pain!'

"My old horse gave an impatient kick and snort—an unwonted show of feeling for him—she tightened her hold on the bridle, and keeping her large eyes still fixed on my face, spoke again—'Tell me,' she said, almost peremptorily, 'your name, and where you live.' I told her at once, for I felt there was something behind all this I could not understand, and that I was dealing with no common beggar-woman, but with some poor suffering creature, whom trouble or sin, or both, had well-nigh driven to desperation. 'What can I do for you?' I asked, pitying her from the bottom of my heart, yet altogether bewildered

by my own helplessness and the depth of her misery. 'This you can do,' she replied, drawing the infant from under her cloak, wrapped in a coarse warm blanket, 'this babe, born in a workhouse, is Sir Geoffrey Colet's only child, in his arms I would have placed it this night, had not my strength failed me as you see'—she broke off abruptly for a moment, then began again, 'you must take the child to him, give it into his own hands, and tell him Margaret sent it.' As she spoke she laid the baby across my saddle, and in another instant she was gone, slipping, like a ghost almost, through a break in the hedge, and whither she went I knew not.

"What was to be done? I looked around for help, but whence could it come? Not even a hut within a mile, and no one who cared for his horse would be likely to traverse

the cold slippery roads at that time of night. I dared not fulfil the woman's request, and carry back the little one to Castle Mount, for how could I face Sir Geoffrey with such a message as hers; so there was no help for it, I must take the baby home with me to St. Quentin, and urging my old hack forwards, I set off on the strangest seven miles canter that ever boy of fifteen undertook, with a new-born babe held tightly in one arm. I looked round on every side as I went along for the poor half-crazed creature, for such I felt sure she must be, but she was nowhere to be seen. The light was dim, the hedges high and broken, with here and there a stone wall, casting a heavy shadow, and I might have hunted half through the night without discovering any traces of her in that country of hollows and curves, and many hiding-

places. So I resolved to get the infant home to my mother as quickly as possible, and consult with her as to what it was best to do.

"On arriving home I found our little household in a terrible state of anxiety. During my absence that day a change had set in in my father's condition, and he had become so much worse that my mother had resolved to start for our home—then at the little village of Driffield, on the borders of Somerset—as soon as possible, fearing lest in a day or two he might be unable to undertake so long a journey.

"I placed the little baby in her arms, and told her all my wild and wonderful story. She shook her head. 'Max,' she said, 'I scarcely know how to advise you, my own troubles are growing upon me so fast; we will

take care of the little creature at any rate, and think what ought to be done.'

"The next day we started for Driffield, and my father grew so rapidly worse, that all her thoughts and time were taken up with watching and tending him, and the baby fell to the care of our trusted old servant. More than once I called my mother's attention to the fact that Sir Geoffrey was still in ignorance of his daughter's existence. 'How do you know she is his daughter, Max?' she replied, 'depend upon it if there is any truth in that poor woman's story, she will force her claims upon the father of her child herself. She knows, you say, your name; very well then, Sir Geoffrey can easily claim his child if he wishes to; and meantime the little creature will do very well where she is. In any case I dare not confront Sir Geoffrey with

this wild and improbable story, which may after all have been invented by some unfortunate servant-woman as a means of disposing of her illegitimate child.' So things went on, one change following another in rapid succession in our small homestead. My father died about a fortnight after our return to Driffield, and we removed shortly afterwards to London, to the old house in Cheyne Walk, where I am living at the present moment.

"Meantime, although in constant correspondence with friends in the neighbourhood of Pentallack, no whisper reached us of scandals of any sort connected with Sir Geoffrey Colet, nor, indeed, with any one else, for the matter of that. Sir Geoffrey's name had always stood very high in the county, no one had ever heard it coupled in any way with a woman's loss of fame, and as

I grew older I began to agree with my mother's notion that the story of the poor, half-crazed woman was either a fabrication or a delusion.

"Motives of tenderness towards Anna prevented our ever disclosing to her the sad story of that snowy winter's ride, and she has grown up to womanhood believing herself to be what all our friends and acquaintances imagine her—my mother's daughter, and my only sister. As for my mother and myself, we do not know how to thank God enough for the trust committed to my care by that poor forlorn woman.

"Perhaps I should add I have naturally felt a repugnance to communicate these facts to Llewellyn March, not knowing in what light he may view them, as being connected with his uncle's name. I have been led to

overcome this repugnance, or rather, see the necessity for so doing, by the fact that of late my house has been persistently watched by a woman whose large black eyes have forcibly recalled those of the poor wretched creature who placed her child in my arms some eighteen years ago. I think it more than possible that some sort of claims may be advanced on Anna's behalf shortly by some person or persons, and it is just as well that my statement should be made beforehand, and committed to the care of some one on whose honour and discretion I can rely.

"(Signed) MAXIMILIAN TREGO."

Llewellyn read the manuscript through, eagerly, hurriedly, in a perfect whirl of amazement.

Then he pauses to think.

Again he takes it up and goes through it slowly and carefully, without missing a word, weighing and emphasising each sentence.

What does it all mean? Which way do his own thoughts and suppositions tend? Distinctly comes back to him the day to which Max refers—the day of Archie's funeral, and he, a boy of ten, heart-broken for the loss of his dear little companion and playfellow; the bitter, snowy March weather, the miserable service in the castle chapel, and the last look at the coffin in the dark, cold mausoleum.

From this he turns to another picture—the July evening when he and Max were sitting in the "dusty London balcony," and the wandering singing woman aroused so strangely the memories of Archie and Anna. He recollects the words of the woman's song,

her wild, sorrowful black eyes, the anxious, enquiring look of Max at her, and the hasty manner in which he sends her "home to get some supper."

Mixed with these memories, come back others of Sir Geoffrey, how of late the cloud which had hung over him had deepened and lowered, and how, day by day, he had seemed to droop and shrink. How strangely agitated he had been on hearing this same song sung on the day of the festival, and, finally, his dying, half-uttered words of some woman with glittering black eyes who passed before him like a ghost.

Again Llewellyn pauses to think, and to endeavour to connect together in some sort of sequence these strange occurrences. To what does it all point? What is the most obvious interpretation of these hitherto

enigmas? "One and the same woman," sums up Lllewellyn decisively; and what follows then? He scarcely dare even whisper to himself the words at once so improbable and so fraught with joy—"What if Anna should after all prove to be Sir Geoffrey's daughter and heiress!"

CHAPTER VI.

LLEWELLYN rose the next morning with glad thoughts in his heart. How marvellous it was that just at the very moment when the mystery seemed darkest and deepest the veil should be suddenly lifted, and facts and incidents appear which put the whole matter in train for a simple solution. "There are yet links to be found in this wonderful chain of evidence," thinks Llewellyn, "but in my wildest, most hopeful dreams of Sir Geoffrey's heir, and my prayer that he might prove worthy of his great trusts, I could never have dreamed of one half so worthy or so

noble as sweet little Anna. No letter from Victoria again this morning! What can it mean? Is it possible one has miscarried, and she is expecting and waiting for me to go over."

Accordingly, immediately after breakfast, he rides away to Pentallack with but one thought, one hope, one feeling in his heart.

"My darling—from her own lips I shall hear the confession of her love and truth."

On arriving, however, at Lady Mary's villa, a great surprise awaits him. The upper part of the house is entirely closed, and there are unmistakable signs of extensive house-cleaning operations going on in the lower.

A man comes forward to hold his horse.

"Are the ladies at home?" Llewellyn asks, wonderingly, preparing to dismount.

"They left yesterday for St. Leonards, sir," replies the man.

"Yesterday, for St. Leonards," repeats Llewellyn, bewildered.

"There is a letter left to be sent to you to-day, sir," the man goes on, "would you wish to have it?"

Llewellyn silently takes the letter from his hand, and turns his horse's head once more towards home. What does it mean? Left yesterday without a word or message!

Hurriedly he opens the tiny dainty note (come at last) in Victoria's writing, and reads words which send a chill to his heart and fire to his brain, and the young, bright, trustful Llewellyn March, who rode along Pentallack road so hopefully that morning, dies there and then, and another Llewellyn March takes his place, a sad, stricken, heart-

sick man, who will bear the bruise of his burdens to his very grave.

"DEAR MR. MARCH (so ran the letter),

"Pray pardon my seeming want of courtesy in leaving home thus without writing or sending to you. I am sure you will believe me when I say I have been induced to do so by feelings of real kindness to yourself and a desire to spare both of us what could not fail to be a most painful interview.

"I have received from Lady Mary Cathrow a faithful account of your visit to her the other day, and fully appreciate the high motives which led you to speak so frankly of your present position and circumstances. Let me assure you that your confidence in this matter will not be betrayed by us.

"I have no doubt whatever (knowing you as intimately as I do) that your real object

in thus coming was to release me from my engagement to you, and to allow me to withdraw my promises given under such totally different circumstances. Most sincerely I thank you for your kind thoughtfulness, and most gratefully do I accept your offer of release. I have thought well and long over the matter, and am convinced that by so doing I am best considering your happiness and my own, and I feel confident that in time you will thank me for acting thus promptly and decisively.

"I am interrupted, and must conclude my letter abruptly. I intended to have said more, but what does it matter? May God bless you, and forgive me.

"Believe me to remain,

"Yours very truly,

"VICTORIA CATHROW."

How he read the letter, how the words reached his understanding, he never knew. He was like a man suddenly stunned by some heavy weight falling on his head; a feeling of numbness spread itself through his frame; he looked on the sun-lit world around him, on the bright blue sea, the yellow waving corn, and listened to the sweet twittering birds in the woodland, but the colour, the music, had died out of it all, and he felt like some dumb soul looking out on a dumb dark world.

Yet what was it, after all? what had happened? Only a woman had broken faith with a man; only a girl had had the choice of two worlds offered to her, and she chose the seen and temporal, rather than the unseen and eternal—the riches, the pleasure, the luxury of life, rather than its poverty and love, and truth!

How he reached home he did not know, he remembered the betrothal ring falling from the letter as he rode along, and a little curly headed boy running after him with it in the dusty road; some ladies driving recognized him as they passed, yet he felt too stupified even to lift his hat to them; on he went with his hand pressed tightly to his forehead, only one wish in his heart, that of the wounded hunted animal, who longs to creep away somewhere to hide himself.

The horse stopped at the Castle gate, his servant came out.

"Mr. Everhard wishes to speak to you, sir," he says. Llewellyn gazes at him vacantly, "The Reverend Anthony, sir, the chaplain," repeats the man, "he says you must have forgotten him; you went out at eleven, when you had promised to see him." The man waits. "He is in the library, sir." Llewellyn

dismounts mechanically, and goes into the library.

The chaplain is there, tall, dark, thin—a man who has thought much, but always in one groove; read much but always in one groove; prayed much still in the same narrow circle, and besides all this, and above all this, a man of great sensitiveness, and easily wounded feelings. He rises as Llewellyn enters. His pride or sensitiveness will not allow him even to hold out his hand. No, the first advance must rightly come from the man who has so seriously wounded him.

But Llewellyn makes no advance whatever. He stands with his hands resting on the table, waiting for the chaplain to begin.

"I fear I am intruding, Mr. March," he commences in his highest stiffest tones. "But circumstances have occurred in the house-

hold lately, that I cannot with dignity pass over, and I feel that it is incumbent on me to speak."

Llewellyn, still and silent as a statue, makes no reply. Then it is that his white haggard face first attracts the chaplain's attention.

"Are you ill, Mr. March?" he asks.

"Ill," repeats Llewellyn, "oh, no, go on." He was right indeed, no, not ill, but struck with almost mortal agony.

"What I have to complain of, Mr. March," the chaplain continues, "is the want of confidence with which I have been treated. I was, as you know, an old and tried friend of Sir Geoffrey's, and one of the first he would have trusted in a matter of importance. Yet I am receiving information at second-hand, from Wilson even, and others, as to great and

important changes about to be made here, in fact, that the Castle will pass into other hands than yours. I am deeply hurt, Mr. March, deeply hurt."

Deeply hurt was he! It seemed to Llewellyn's mind almost like a man complaining of a head-ache to another who had received his death wound.

"I am very sorry," begins Llewellyn, his habitual courtesy in a measure returning to him. "I am very sorry not to have thought of you, but my mind has been distracted by many pressing anxieties. Pray accept my apologies."

He turns to leave the room, but the chaplain is not satisfied yet.

"Then it is all true, Mr. March, you mean to give up your inheritance?" he asks, his curiosity mastering even his sense of dignity.

"Yes, it is all true," replies Llewellyn, anxious only to end the interview and escape into solitude. "It is all true, except that I am not giving up my inheritance. There is another heir, that is all, and I have no right to hold it any longer."

"Then it is taken out of your hands, Mr. March? It must be a heavy blow to you." Now he thinks the white haggard face is accounted for. "I trust grace will be given you to say the will of the Lord be done." Llewellyn looks at him curiously. The chaplain goes on. "You must pardon me if I speak plainly, Mr. March. It appertains to my office so to speak; I have dreaded some such crash as this for a long time. When I have watched Sir Geoffrey and yourself heaping up the treasures of your house, a costly picture here, a priceless statue there,

and that crowning piece of luxury—and pardon me, sir, extravagance—your superb festival, then I said to myself, 'they are making idols of these things, and God will dethrone them, they are resting in them, and loving them more than they rest in and love their Creator. He is a jealous God, and will have no rival; He will stretch out His strong right arm and cast them down.'"

He pauses with flushed eager face; Llewellyn turns on him.

"And this is your God, Everhard! This is the God whom you preach! Oh, miserable people, who have such teaching forced on them! Oh, miserable priest, who believes in such a deity! I will not bow before such a God as yours. A God who gives His children poisoned sweets, and when He sees they have grown to love them, and the poison has

entered their life's blood, stretches forth His hand, and snatches them away. I will have no such God as He. The God whom I worship and serve, rules His world by laws, perfect, absolute, unchanging. By laws commenced in eternity, ending only with eternity, pressing alike on all His creatures, perfectly, absolutely, and unchangingly. For every incident in these lives of ours there is a law of God which deals it out to us; each circumstance in our life's day emanates from such a law, as a natural consequence, as a matter of course. We have but to dig down deep enough to the root of things, with an honest, persevering will, and we shall find the law lying there. You or I may lack the honesty of purpose, the strength of will, the clearness of intellect, to discover the special law which governs our special circumstances; let us not,

therefore, impute tiny capricious human motives to the one All-perfect; let us rather stretch forth our hands with humility, and cry, 'we are blind, we cannot find our way, the light is there, but we cannot see it! It is all darkness for us—darkness and chaos!'"

Then he turns and leaves the room.

At length, in his own study—at length, in quiet and solitude! He closes the door, takes out Victoria's letter and reads it through slowly. But this time the words seem to have lost all meaning and sequence for him.

He repeats them aloud again and again, but always with the same result. He does not notice the inconsistency of the writer; how in the smooth, well-worded commencement of the letter, she is sure she is acting for the best, and that some day he will thank her for so acting, and how, at the end, she

breaks off abruptly, praying that God will forgive her—for what, she does not say.

Little, indeed, does he think that the interruption she speaks of was a wild torrent of love and passion, that surged upwards from the bottom of her heart, and would have its way. Little does he know that the last few lines were penned with trembling fingers, and between passionate bursts of grief, and that for long hours afterwards the young fair head lay bowed upon the table in that sharp, terrible agony which only young hearts can know.

He feels that Victoria's letters and presents ought to be returned to her. He draws her ring from his finger, and folds it in an envelope. Then leans once more his head on his clasped hands, trying to think, trying to feel, trying to realise his loss.

He knows that sooner or later this numb-

ness of brain and heart will cease, and he will awake to sharp pain and suffering; that he will realise to the full the bitterness of his bereavement and the desolateness and emptiness of all the years to come; that the present is but a lull, a calm, a silence, before the storm breaks forth.

So the day wore on. No one ventured to disturb him in his suffering and solitude. Hour after hour passed, and the world for him stood still.

The long evening sunbeams played on his narrow arched window. The sweet south wind brought in the summer scents from the moor-land, and the blackbirds and throstles began their evening hymns.

In a vague sort of way he thought of the Llewellyn March who sat in the same seat only last evening, happy, trustful, looking

forward to his work in life and his crown of love.

He wondered over him as one would wonder over a near friend or relative; tried to realise that he himself, sitting there, was that same Llewellyn March; tried to bring back the thoughts, the hopes, the ambitions, that flitted through his brain as he sat there reading Max' manuscript.

But it would not do. The purport even of the manuscript had passed from his memory. Only a few lines came dimly back to his mind, the passionate words of the woman, as she stood lonely and desolate in the snowy road, "Death is better than life, for life means pain."

Pain! pain! Ah, it would soon come now, and he would drink its cup to the dregs. Then a dark cloud fell over him. "Death is

better than life—better than life." Aye, better a thousandfold than the life now stretching out before him. Sweeter, far, to lie down for ever in darkness and silence, than to wait here for the awakening to anguish and misery, which he felt must come.

And there, straight in front of him on the table, lay a flat dark case, with silver lock!

"Death is better than life." The words rang and echoed in his ears, as though spoken by some distinct human voice. The south wind seemed to bring it in at the window. It sounded loud above the blackbird's carol, and came back in the wash of the waves on the shore.

The shadows of night fell. Still he sat there, with his head resting on his hands, and always, straight in front of him on the table, lay a flat dark case with silver lock!

Out of the depth of his misery came his salvation; out of the agony of his temptation came forth his strength.

A wild cry for help! no words, but only the cry of a child, "Alone and helpless, in the night," came forth from his lips. Then the pistols are dropped from the Castle window into the dark shadow beneath, and Llewellyn March lies wearied, helpless, worn out, with his face turned eastwards, waiting for the dawn.

It came at length, the grey light, mixed with silver; the blue shade edged with gold; the rose red clouds and mountains, and then the great sun rose upon the earth.

Llewellyn, tottering, weak as a child, and with an old, worn look on his face, kneels and thanks God for his salvation.

Then, before any of the household have

risen, he goes silently and softly down the stairs and along the corridors, to the door of Newton's room.

He finds the old man up and dressed, for, indeed, he has watched through the night also, fearing, he knew not what, for his young friend.

"Thank God, Mr. Llewellyn!" he exclaims, advancing to meet him, and seizing his hand. Then he starts back with wonder and amazement, for the face he looks on is like the ghost of the young bright face he knew yesterday; hollow, haggard, aged.

"Don't trouble about me, Newton," says Llewellyn, in a low, far-away tone. "I have been hard hit, that is all. I must for a time give up my old pursuits and get action and a new life somewhere. Don't trouble about me; I am going on to London or Paris, I am

not sure which, but will write to you without fail, and tell you my plans, when I have any. Don't reason with me now, Newton," he adds, as he sees the old man about to speak. "Only come with me to the Castle gate, and bid me God speed in my other life."

The morning mists are still drooping over rock and sea; the low trilling of half-awakened birds comes from the firs and pines, as the old man follows him along the terraces, through the mossy avenues, over the dew-sprinkled lawns, and then under the shadow of a great oak, looks his last at Llewellyn March.

"Driven from his home, poor, poor boy," he thinks. "In all the world no shelter nor resting-place for him."

And Llewellyn, without a tear or sigh, looks his last at his old Castle home, stand-

ing out in rich soft tints against the glowing morning sky.

"Unanchored now," he thinks. "Alone on the wide sea."

A shadow falls across his path. A man stands in front of him with a letter in his hand.

"For you, sir, I think. It should have been sent up with the Castle letters last night, but fell by mistake into the post-box again."

Llewellyn takes it from his hand mechanically and opens it.

And this is what he reads—

"Chelsea Workhouse Infirmary.

"If Mr. March wishes to know more of an old well-worn Bible from which is missing the eleventh chapter of St. John, will he call as soon as possible at the above address."

CHAPTER VII.

A FINE breezy day on the Sussex shore; light clouds skimming across the blue sky; white sails dotted here and there on the rippling sea; crowds of children coming from the beach with flapping sun-hats, and tiny hands filled with all sorts of sea-treasures. Sir Charles Oldfield, in his luxurious invalid's chair, is being drawn by his servant along the esplanade, with another man and a boy in attendance. His daughter Miriam, in scrupulously inelegant dress, sits on a sunny seat shading her eyes with a huge green umbrella. By her side are two little

packets of tracts, one addressed to the infidel and hardened sinner, the second to the would-be Christian. These she is distributing industriously to the passers-by.

"A great deal of discretion and discernment is required in this, my morning's work," she is remarking to a curate of one of the neighbouring churches, who leans over the back of her seat. "But I flatter myself I have not laboured for ten years among all classes of sinners without learning to know a church-goer from an absolute worldling at a dozen yards distance."

The Curate nods and smiles to her. Sir Charles passes in his chair at an easy pace.

"At it still, Miriam?" he enquires, languidly turning his head towards her. In reply she hands him a tract, through the Curate's hands.

"No, thank you," says the Baronet. "I am trying to get an appetite for lunch. Ah, if one could only eat! Eating is the thing to bring a man up to the mark! I am sick and tired of the doctors and their prescriptions. I have had five-and-twenty physicians in succession this year (this to the Curate). Five-and-twenty, sir, and you see the miserable being I am."

He passes on with his retinue; his daughter shakes her head slowly and sadly.

"If he would but turn his thoughts to higher things," she says, and the Curate nods and smiles at her again.

A lady is sitting writing at a davenport in one of the large bay windows overlooking the esplanade. From behind a screen of flowers she can see the Baronet's chair passing and repassing. She looks up from her letter

to speak to a young girl leaning back in a low chair with hands lying listlessly before her.

"If you would only wait, Victoria," she is saying. "You are very young, and at the end of another season you would see matters in a different light."

The girl makes no reply. The elder lady goes on—

"I have no wish to see you hurried into this marriage. Sir Charles Oldfield might be a very desirable *parti* for some staid, middle-aged person who has had a great deal of trouble, and would be thankful for a good home under any conditions, and above all, who thoroughly understands sick-nursing in all its branches. But for you, at your age, and with your opportunities, to give yourself voluntarily to such a life of seclusion and

'tiresomeness' (for there is no other word) would be quite too ridiculous!"

"Yet that is what I intend to do," replies Victoria. Her old repose of manner has come back to her; her smile is as sweet as ever, but her voice has a positiveness, a chilling note in it which in the old days it never knew.

"See him now," continues the first speaker, scarcely heeding the girl's reply. "See them both, for there is the daughter at her usual occupation. Now, picture to yourself what your life would be for one day between those two. The father's endless requirements; his perpetual consultations with physicians about his real or fancied ailments; his incessant babble as to his want of appetite; his weak nerves; the daily martyrdom he endures through his bad cook."

"Think of the settlements he would make on his second wife!" languidly interposes Victoria.

Lady Mary takes no notice of the interruption.

"The daughter too! How could you, with your fastidious refinement, endure her bad style, her slovenly dress, and ill-arranged hair? Her prayers and sermons to the household generally at all sorts of inconvenient times; her perpetual curate, or lay preacher, by her side, and the ceaseless distribution of tracts to every living being who comes in contact with her, in season or out of season."

"The whole of his Yorkshire estates, and his house in Paris, would be included in the marriage settlement I am told," ejaculates Victoria.

"Victoria, think well over it. It would not be wise, nor right, for you to marry a man without some such possessions as these. But there are men whose characters and surroundings are too objectionable to be balanced by any amount of wealth or land."

"A valuable lead mine, near Bettws-y-Coed," Victoria goes on.

"Victoria, listen to reason," replies Lady Mary. "It is the last time I shall discuss this matter with you. From your earliest infancy your happiness and best interests have ever been my one thought and care, and it is but right that my voice should be heard now. Can you not give yourself a little time for reflection before you take upon yourself duties and responsibilities for which you are utterly unsuited?"

"It is useless either to reflect upon or

discuss the matter any longer. I gave him my final answer this morning, and we are to be married within a month!"

"Then I will say no more," said Lady Mary, rising, and putting away her papers, "for a second broken engagement is not to be thought of; in fact, would be most damaging to you in your second season. But again I reiterate it would have been far wiser if you had given yourself more time; if you had reflected a little before taking so important a step."

"If I had taken time; if I had reflected," repeats Victoria, standing erect and stately before her aunt, with her small head thrown back proudly, and her pale face flushing crimson. "If I had taken time, there is but one thing I should have done, sought out *him* (she emphasises the word) if need were

on hands and knees, to beg his forgiveness, and followed him bare-footed round the world to make atonement, if possible, for my sin!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE long summer's twilight was ebbing into the shades of night as Llewellyn entered London. With a feeling of relief, he looked round on the closed houses and quiet squares. The season was well past, and he had no fear that any friend or acquaintance would in any way break in upon his solitude, or disturb his plans.

Plans! But what plans had he formed, could he form, in his disturbed, tumultuous state of mind? He was only conscious of a feeling of deepest relief that the old tender ties and associations were left so far behind,

and an intense longing for some quiet refuge where he might rest and think.

But to think was the difficulty. All through the long hours of his journey to London he had been trying to think, to plan, to arrange his affairs for the best, but found it simply an impossibility to do so. His subject slipped from his mind; his reasoning was broken and disconnected, and, when he essayed to force his brain to the work, a rushing sound, as of the whirl and wash of the waves of the sea, filled his ears, and rendered him almost sick and giddy. Once or twice the noise grew so loud in his brain that he looked from the windows of the carriage, feeling sure that he must be nearing the coast; but his eyes undeceived him, and he sank back again on his seat with a terrible fear growing up in his heart.

"Oh, for old Max to lean on now!" he thought, as he entered the vast wilderness of streets and shops, and looked round on strange unfamiliar faces; then scarcely knowing what he did, without reasoning or thinking on the matter, he took the road which led straight down to the old river-side house.

And all the way he went the rush and wash of the sea grew louder and louder in his ears.

Along by the side of the river he went, bright pictures of the past floating vaguely before him; pleasant pulls on the water with Max in the golden evenings; long arguments on theology or philosophy, as the case might be, in which each vainly strove for the mastery; wanderings through picture galleries or the studios of some of the many artists who lived so near at hand, and one never-to-

be-forgotten evening spent with the great Carlyle.

The houses closed one by one as he walked along, here and there the stars began to dot the evening sky.

And all this time the rush and wash of the sea grew louder and louder in his ears.

Anna is leaning from the window into the "dusty London balcony," where the mother is clipping and training the creepers into some sort of floral architecture round the wooden pillars; she is talking in a low voice to the girl half reprovingly half caressingly—

"Your voice will be grand and rich some day, love; I think you have mistaken Max's meaning!"

"But," persists Anna, "I can't always be mistaking his meaning; yesterday he walked out of the room directly I sat down to the

piano, and to-day he was positively rude to me."

The mother sighs. How she longs to lift the veil which hides the truth from the girl's eyes, and makes poor old Max with his well-concealed love seem harsh and repellant to her!

Anna goes on, "I think I will give up everything besides, and devote all my time to painting; perhaps, then, I may succeed better."

"Then Anna," says the mother, and this time severely, "you must turn your thoughts to something else than angel's faces. You seem to have but one idea in your brain just now! On every scrap of paper or canvas in your room there are sketches or attempts at sketches of seraph's heads. And always the same face!" she adds, meaningly.

Anna makes no reply. Out of the shadows on the misty river shines for her the same face—out of the steel-blue of the night sky the same face looks down on her.

What would she have said could she have seen her angel's face, as he stood in the shadow of the great trees opposite, and cast one sad, longing, piteous look at the old house with its sweet home life within. Only *one* look, for a second would have overpowered his will, and made him helpless to resist the strong yearning in his desolate young heart, for the love and friendship so true and tried which he knew would meet him there. Only one look, and he turned his face away to the dark river, and bent his steps once more towards the crowded, busy, yet to him, lonely London streets.

And all this time the rush and wash of

the sea sounded louder and louder in his ears.

"I want a room for the night," he said, going up to a man at the door of one of the quiet hotels in a side street.

The man looked at him doubtingly, the proprietor standing near, came forward. A gentleman, staggering almost, with a wild haggard look on his face and no luggage! "Dipsomania without a doubt!" he thinks. "Very sorry, sir, we are full; not one bed to spare." Then he signals to the porter who closes the door.

"Turned from the door," thinks Llewellyn, scarcely realising the fact as he leans against the porch, the streets and people growing dimmer and vaguer to his eyes, and the rush of the sea sounding louder and louder in his ears. "What is to be done? let me think,

what money have I here?" He puts his hand in his pocket to draw out his purse, and brings forth with it the tiny badly-written note that had been given him on leaving Castle Mount in the morning. "This must go to Max," he thinks. "It ought to be seen into at once, I have no brains left now for such work." He totters rather than walks towards the open door of a small inn, which he sees on the other side of the road. "Can I have a quiet room to write a letter?" he inquires of the landlord, in a voice so weak and quavering he does not know his own tones.

The landlord, occupied with many customers, does not notice his flushed face and trembling hands, and shows him into a small parlour, where a man, with some papers spread before him, is already seated, busily

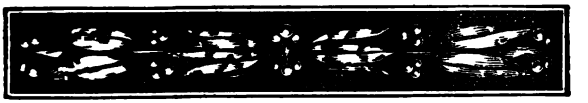
writing. He looks up as Llewellyn enters, and notices, what the landlord has failed to notice, the strange wandering look in Llewellyn's eyes, and his feeble, unsteady walk.

How dim the room seemed! What a haze was spreading itself over the lights, the pictures, the furniture! Llewellyn felt for a chair, and sat down at a small low table, trying to collect his thoughts. There was that letter to send to Max, where had he put it? He leaned his head on his hand wearily. How his forehead scorched and burned, how icy cold his hands were, and the rush and the roar of the sea overwhelmed every other sound now. Surely he must have wandered down to Castle Mount rocks, in his sleep, and these were the old Cornish breakers again! Then Max's address, somewhere near a river. He groped

along the table for a pen, then his arm fell helplessly to his side, for sight and senses were fast failing him. The man who sat writing in the corner sprang across the room to him. He was tall and powerfully built, with a dark, furrowed, but not unkindly face.

"See here," he said. "My name is John Elliott, and I was a gentleman once. Can I be of any service to you?"

Llewellyn fell back in his arms, breathing heavily. Brain fever had set in.



CHAPTER IX.

A SHORT, sharp, struggle for life followed, in which Llewellyn's young, vigorous constitution fought bravely against the fever which held him in its iron grasp; fought and conquered, as young vigorous constitutions can and will conquer, when they have not been undermined by dissipation and excess, however strong the enemy may seem. His new friend was zealous and unremitting in his attention to him. He tended him at night himself, nor ever left him in the day-time, even for rest or refreshment, unless the landlady of the

house could take his place. He was a man of few words, somewhat brusque and repellant in manner, with a harsh, unmusical laugh, and a bitter smile. In his ministrations to Llewellyn, however, another phase of his character showed itself; he became thoughtful, observant and prompt, as a clever doctor might be, and tender and soft-handed as the gentlest nurse.

The people of the inn knew nothing of him; had not seen him before the evening of Llewellyn's visit to the house. All they knew or cared was that he paid his bills promptly, and gave very little trouble. He seldom commenced a conversation with any one, nor even volunteered a remark; he would sit for hours silent and thoughtful, his only companion a carved silver-mounted pipe, from which (as Llewellyn remarked when he grew

to convalescence) the crest and initials had been carefully erased.

When once the fever had been subdued, Llewellyn's strength came back to him rapidly, and he felt the necessity of arousing himself to action of some sort, as the one remedy against apathy and despair. About Victoria he could think calmly now, never in anger or bitterness, but with a great feeling of pity, such as only the best and noblest can feel for the one who has wounded and smitten them. "Poor child," he thought, "her life will be crooked and distorted now, a blurred, marred thing, when she gives it up into her Maker's hands!" No "sweet self-pity" ever entered his heart, nor passionate grief for his own young life, so clouded and saddened. "I am all unstrung, all out of tune," he would think, "and my life must be a silent one for a little

while. But what does it matter so long as I mar not the choir of the glad-hearted ones with my harsh discordant notes!"

So the days went on and he grew stronger and stronger, and made more than one effort to thank the kind-hearted stranger, who had done so much for him.

"Don't speak of it," said John Elliott, abruptly and peremptorily, as he sat leaning against Llewellyn's couch, unfolding his evening's newspaper and filling his pipe. "I don't want to be thanked. I think after all I should have done you a greater kindness if I had left you alone to die, rather than have brought you round to face your troubles again."

Llewellyn looked up in amazement. What did this mysterious man know of himself and his troubles?

"Don't worry yourself," Elliott went on,

"you have not betrayed any family secrets in your wanderings and delirium. All I know is that you are a Mr. March, of Castle Mount, Cornwall, and that information I obtained from the envelope of the letter which fell from your hand the night you were taken ill."

"That letter!" exclaimed Llewellyn, gathering his thoughts together, "was not that sent on to Max? It ought to have been attended to without delay."

"I would have sent it on to Max—whoever he may be—with pleasure," interrupted Elliott, "if I had known where to find him. That envelope only showed me, what, indeed, any one could see, that you were well-born and bred. The rest I could read in your face. That some heavy blow had fallen upon you and cut you adrift from your home and

your friends, that, in fact, your were doing, as many a one has done before you, fleeing from your fate. Who was I that I should give you up again to your 'sweet home ties,'" with a bitter laugh. "To the devil with all such ties, say I, for his satanic majesty must have forged them himself for the peculiar benefit of his people and kingdom."

He turns his back abruptly on Llewellyn, folds his journal once more, and commences reading; then, with a sudden exclamation, lays it down and jumps to his feet.

"Great Heavens!" he exclaims, "the first shot fired, and I sitting here in this cursed hole!"

"Aye," he went on, in reply to Llewellyn's look of amazement, "you, lying here between life and death, did not know the drama that was being played out before the eyes of

Europe. How that France and Prussia, equally tired of mutually insulting, annoying and generally aggravating each other, have determined to try their strength and skill in open war. Hear this," and he commenced reading from the foreign correspondence of his paper, "This is what the Frenchmen say—'Prussia insults us, let us cross the Rhine! The soldiers of Jena are ready! *à bas la Prusse! à bas Bismarck! vive la Guerre!* and *à Berlin!*'"

What is this? Llewellyn's brain is in a whirl. What sudden hope is this springing up in his heart? What craving and yearning for action and excitement, to be, as it were, once more living, acting, moving among his fellows?

"This will be a grand struggle," Elliott goes on. "I have seen some fighting in my

time, but never with King Chassepôt and Queen Mitrailleuse to the front. We must part company now, my young friend, for I must get into the very thick of this."

"And why must we part company?" asks Llewellyn, with a flushed face and a sparkling eye. "I won't say that my services would be a great acquisition to the French, or any other army, but if you can by any means carry me into the 'thick' of it with you, you may depend I will do my part. Ah! it is the one thing above all others," he goes on, "to bring back my old nerve and strength."

Elliott looks up amazed.

"It is quite true I have not yet seen you at your best, March, but I did not think it was in you at any time to light up in this style. By all means come with me. I have

interest in two or three quarters in the French army, with Lebœuf, and, above all, with L'Admirault. He will, I feel sure, at once place me on his staff, and it will be hard indeed if we cannot find a corner for you somewhere. But what about your friends?" he inquires, the same bitter smile spreading itself over his face. "It doesn't follow because I have snapped all such ties, and cast them to the four winds, that you should do the same."

"I have snapped no ties," interrupted Llewellyn, "death severed one, and—"

"And the falsehood of woman another," finishes Elliott. "Don't tell me the old story over again. Nine-tenths of the lives that are wrecked may trace a woman's hand in their ruin. My only wonder is that when the devil made the world he didn't send

more women into it. The sirens and enchantresses would have done his work far better for him than the fiends and imps he employs sometimes."

"And so you believe in the devil?" inquires Llewellyn, eyeing Elliott curiously.

"I do," replies Elliott, "for I believe he has far more to do with our make and our fashioning, our living and our dying, than any other being, created or divine!"

"You are looking at things upside down," says Llewellyn simply. "As far as I follow your argument, it stands thus:—All sorrow and pain come from the devil, the world is full of sorrow and pain, therefore, it is the devil's world, created and governed by him. I, looking at things from another point of view, argue thus:—This world is created by a perfect God, and governed by His perfect

laws. Sorrow and pain are to be found in this world on every side, therefore, the sorrow and pain must proceed from Him, and be ordered by His laws. The devil has little enough to do with my world!"

Elliott smiled at him grimly.

"Can he have suffered," he thinks, "to talk thus?" Then he shrugs his shoulders. "We will finish our argument the other side of the Channel, if you don't mind, March," he says. "Wait until you have seen your first battle-field; then tell me what you think of your perfect God and His perfect laws!"

CHAPTER X.

LLEWELLYN almost wondered at himself and the alacrity with which his few preparations for his journey were made.

"My nature must be strangely altered by the events of the last few weeks," he thought. "In the old days I should have gone steadily into the right or wrong of the Frenchman's cause before taking up arms for it, and now, here am I throwing all reason and reflection overboard, and yielding blindly, as a dumb animal might, to the strong impulse or instinct which prompts me to rush thus madly into the whirl and excitement of the war!

There is one special comfort," he added, with the nearest approach to bitterness of which his nature was capable: "There is no need to make a will now, nor any special arrangements in case I never return; nor is there any fear of a girl's broken heart if a bullet does its work for me. Beyond old Newton and Max I don't suppose there is a soul who would give me a second thought."

He had already written a long letter to Newton, mentioning his illness (but very slightly), and the kindness of his new friend. He gave him also a few directions as to his papers, books, clothes, and money, which he wished sent to him in London, and then made a special request that he would as soon as possible come up to London and consult with Max Trego as to the papers, etc., referring to the heirship of the estate.

These he specified as Max's manuscript, which he had committed to his (Newton's) care, the leaf of the Bible found in the casket in the chapel, and a letter in Max's hands, which he felt sure would lead to important results.

"I will not bring forward my own ideas on the matter," the letter went on; "but I feel convinced, when you have thought over the whole strange story, as I have, from beginning to end, you can come to but one conclusion as to who is the heiress. There need be very little difficulty with regard to taking possession of the estates and property, for, as you know, no opposition will be offered on my part, and although I have a great objection to making fine speeches on the matter, I shall be very glad if you will mention to the future mistress of Castle Mount what an

immense pleasure it is to me that I yield place to one so worthy.

"*Au reste*, Newton; some day, perhaps, under happier circumstances, we may meet again, and, in any case, may God bless you for all you have done for me."

His letter to Max was very brief—

"DEAR MAX," he wrote,

"Will you kindly attend to the enclosed note for me. I received it the day I left Castle Mount, and am very sorry it has been so long neglected. I have, however, been rather ill in London, and unable to attend to my affairs. You will know why, old fellow, I did not send for you, and will, I feel sure, not attribute my silence to any want of confidence in you, or in your friendship for me.

"Newton will be in London, I hope, almost

as soon as you receive this, and will have much to communicate to you. I know in thus leaving the whole affairs of Castle Mount and its ownership in your hands and his, I am leaving them in the hands of the two wisest, most conscientious and safest guardians who could be found.

"Once more, let me wish you all success in the dearest wish of your heart.

"Your true old Friend,

"LLEWELLYN MARCH."

This letter he had sealed and addressed, ready for posting. Then, recollecting that his friend might possibly be anxious for farther news as to his movements, he once more opened it to add a postscript, thus—

"I re-open my letter to add a line. I am just starting for the seat of war. Do not,

however, be uneasy about me, as I have with me a kind friend—an old soldier—who will look after me. From time to time I will write and let you know where I am, and what I am doing.

"L. M."

Max read through the letter in a perfect whirl of amazement and confusion.

"Llewellyn in London! Ill, too! Llewellyn off to the war! What did it all mean? What was there behind all this?" Something terrible, he felt convinced; but what, he was utterly at a loss to imagine.

He had read of the death of Sir Geoffrey Colet in one of the newspapers, but no particulars of any kind had reached him.

He was utterly removed from the set in which Llewellyn mixed, and although he had

written a brief note of condolence to his friend, Llewellyn, with so much on his hands, had at first had no time to reply to it, and subsequently no heart to do so.

With impatience he awaited the arrival of Newton, and then, when the whole truth was told him—for Newton held back nothing—his anger knew no bounds.

He cursed himself and his selfishness for thus forsaking his friend in the hour of his bitterest need.

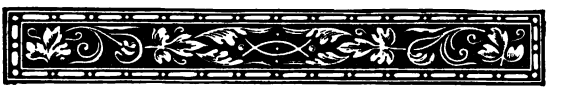
"If," he argued, "I had not written to him that accursed letter he would have sought me out, and I could have given him a refuge in his loneliness, till he had recovered somewhat from the blow that slight thing, that half-hearted girl had dealt him."

Then, as Newton calmly continued his narrative, laying facts before him, reasoning

upon them, and at length bringing forth his own manuscript, and linking it into the wonderful chain of events, every feeling gave way to one of intense astonishment.

"Can it be, is it possible, Newton, it all points one way, that Anna is Sir Geoffrey's legitimate daughter? There must be no further delay. We must go at once to the Workhouse Infirmary."

And to the Workhouse Infirmary they went. Max with a dull sort of pain in his heart behind every other feeling—"She will be further removed than ever from me now," and Newton with a glimmering of hope that out of all this misery and confusion there might yet be a way to reinstate Llewellyn in his old home once more.



CHAPTER XI.

WITHIN the bare, whitewashed walls of the Workhouse Infirmary, a woman lay "sick unto death," a woman, restless, moaning, suffering with one perpetual plaint on her lips—"He will not come, he will not come, and I shall die with my story untold."

The sister of the ward in which she lay grew weary of her ceaseless murmurings.

"What is it you want done?" she said, peevishly. "I had your letter posted as you wished; perhaps the gentleman doesn't care to trouble himself to come so far; if you

have anything on your mind you had better tell it to the chaplain, he is a kind-hearted gentleman enough."

The woman turned her face from the nurse, once more fixing her large black eyes upon the door, starting and trembling each time that it opened to admit a visitor.

"Don't, don't, there's a good soul," began the nurse, soothingly, "You'll soon kill yourself, if you take on like that."

As she spoke, the door opened once more, and Max and Newton entered the long narrow room.

"There she lies," whispered Max to Newton, rapidly scanning the pale faces of the sufferers in their narrow beds, and quickly identifying the street ballad-singer with the woman he had more than once detected in watching his house.

"Whom do you wish to see, sir?" said the nurse, advancing to meet them.

"I want a woman who wrote a letter to Mr. March, of Castle Mount," replied Max, "And I have come in his stead to see her; I don't know her name."

"Nor any one else, sir, I think, for she will tell it to no one," said the nurse, conducting them to the woman's bedside, and placing chairs for them. "Poor thing!" she added, pityingly, "perhaps she has reason to be ashamed of it, we have many such here."

The sick woman raised her head from her pillow—

"It is a lie," she said fiercely, to the nurse, "I am proud to tell my name and my title—I am Lady Colet, widow of Sir Geoffrey Colet, of Castle Mount, and my only daughter is the heiress to his estates."

"Hush! hush!" said Newton, interposing, "we are quite willing to believe your statements, but they must be made to us in proper form; I am a lawyer, and will take down any depositions you may wish to make in writing, with the names and addresses of the witnesses you may choose to call in support of your case."

"This is my witness," said the woman, drawing from under her pillow an old well-worn Bible. She held it out to Newton, pointing to the fly-leaf where, in Sir Geoffrey's well-known handwriting, he could read the following words—

"To my wife Margaret, on our wedding-day, February 4th, 1852."

He handed it to Max, who bent over his shoulder—

"This would be confirmatory evidence,"

he said, "but not positive proof. At present we have no evidence as to your identity with the person described on the fly-leaf. If you please we will take down your depositions."

"One moment," said Max, "I should like the house surgeon to be present if it is possible. You see she is very ill, and the excitement may be dangerous to her. I should like another pair of eyes besides mine to be watching her, so as to make sure no evil consequences will ensue."

The nurse at once despatched a message to the house surgeon, written on the back of one of Max's cards, for Max as a local practitioner was well known to him.

The woman turned uneasily on her bed.

"Take care," she said, "you are wasting precious time, I have much to tell."

The house surgeon soon responded to Max's request.

"She has been here some three or four weeks," he said, in answer to Max's enquiries; "she fell down in the street in a fainting fit, and they brought her in. Poor creature!" he added, in a lower tone, "I did not think she could have lasted so long as this, she is just kept alive by brandy and beef-tea, and may go off at any moment."

The three gentlemen drew round her bed, and Newton wrote down from her lips the strangest, saddest story it had ever been his lot to have confided to him, even in his wide professional experience.

It took long to tell, for at times the woman's voice almost failed her, and sank to the lowest whisper. Then again when excited with her narrative, she relapsed into her native dialect,

and spoke broadest Scotch with such rapidity it was difficult to catch her real meaning. Every ten minutes Max or the surgeon handed some tonic or stimulant to her, and before half her story was told they signalled to Newton he must lay aside his pen for that day at least.

Then she grew wild and excited.

"I must finish to-night," she said, emphatically, "there is no to-morrow for me, if you will not hear me to the end I must find some one who will, for I have much to tell," she raised her voice, her face was flushed, and eyes glittering.

"It is not worth while to contend with the poor creature," whispered the surgeon, "she cannot last till the morning, and if it will afford her an hour's peace to tell her tale, we are bound at almost any cost to give it her."

Then the woman went on once more. The afternoon faded into evening, the night mists and shadows began to fall, before Newton laid down his pen, and the woman sank back exhausted on her pillow.

"You will sleep quietly to-night," said Max, kindly, to the poor worn-out sufferer, "now that your mind is at rest." She made no reply, her lips moved as though about to speak, and her large eyes wandered once more towards the door.

"What is it?" asked Max, "is there anything else you wish done? Do not be afraid to ask it?"

"I dare not ask you to bring my daughter here that I may see and touch her before I go," she whispered, with a piteous look up to his face.

Max was troubled. He did not care to

refuse the mother's dying request, and yet how was it possible in the short time that remained, to prepare Anna for such a terrible meeting and adieu. He thought awhile and then his mind was made up.

"Yes," he said, "she shall come to you, and kiss you; I will lose no time in bringing her here."

It was scarcely a ten minutes' walk from the Infirmary to the old river-side house, and Max's young vigorous stride made the distance less. He found his mother and Anna waiting dinner for him. This however was an every-day occurrence in his household, and called forth no comment.

"Anna," he said, quietly, "I want you to come with me at once to the Infirmary, a poor soul is dying there, and would like—it is a dying woman's fancy—to see the doctor's

sister before she goes. Do you feel equal to it, dear?"

Anna started up at once, pleased to hear the old brotherly ring in Max's voice, yet with a vague trembling and terror of the first dying scene she thus was unexpectedly called upon to witness.

The streets were growing empty and quiet, all sorts of lovely scents came to them from the old-fashioned gardens as they sped rapidly along, and a glorious moon shone out large and red over the silent river.

"Oh," said Anna, shudderingly, as they entered the narrow ward with its long rows of beds and white, pinched sufferers, "how terrible to die in such a place as this. It seems as though a poor soul would be stifled here and could never escape into God's fresh air and sky."

The woman lay very still now, with half-closed eyes. The surgeon had turned away to a neighbouring bed to speak to some other poor creature, who whispered her complaints in a feeble voice to him. Newton leaned back in his chair, himself somewhat wearied with the day's excitement, and the nurse, a little distance off, waited with curiosity the ending of the strange scene.

Max brought Anna close to the woman's side. The lights in the room were somewhat dim, a little twilight came in through a side window, and Anna with the shining of the summer moon still in her eyes, could barely distinguish the woman's outline as she lay so still and motionless.

Suddenly she opened her large dark eyes, and fixed them full on the girl's face, then Anna, startled and amazed, recognised the

eyes that had troubled her in the old Tudor church. The woman's lips moved feebly again, and a look so sad, so utterly hopeless and piteous, came into her face, that Anna yielding to an impulse she could not understand, knelt by her side, and put her arms round her neck.

"Oh, do not die!" said the girl, impetuously, "life is so beautiful, so sweet."

The woman gazed long and earnestly at her, then her look wandered from her fresh young features to Max's open, if somewhat more careworn face. Were her thoughts going back to her own fresh young days when life to her was sweet, and love not a memory but a reality? Or did the snowy evening among the Cornwall hedges and lanes come back once more, and a vision of Max, with her little daughter clasped in his arms, pass

before her mind? Her fingers groped in the growing dark to touch Anna's dress; as the girl bent over her, her lips moved once more, and her voice sounded forth like some far away echo.

"Death is better than life!" she whispered, in hollow tones, "for death is peace!"

"Kiss her, Anna dear," said Max, softly, "and bid God bless her."

Anna did so, the great weary eyes closed, the feeble fluttering of the fingers ceased—and the poor worn-out sufferer was at rest.

CHAPTER XII.

ANNA rose the next day sad and dispirited; she had been terribly shocked by the overnight's scene, and felt it would be some time ere her nerves recovered their old tone. Never before had she been brought face to face with death, and now she felt, as she realized to the full, the awfulness and terrors of the grave, that hitherto it had only been to her a name, some far-away thing, some distant phantom shadow, which perhaps in the years to come might draw near and prove a reality.

Max, too, was more than ever silent and

reserved. He had indeed very much to occupy his thoughts, he felt the absolute necessity that Anna should know the whole truth now without reserve; but the difficulty was how best to tell it to her, and the more he thought over the sad story, the more he shrank from the task. Newton had given orders that the body of Lady Colet should be at once removed to Castle Mount, there to be buried in the family Mausoleum with due honours, and he was most anxious that the proper legal forms should be at once gone through, and the heiress installed in her inheritance. Vague hopes began to shape themselves in his mind as he looked at her sweet young face, and noted her unaffected and simple girlish ways.

"Ah!" he thought, "if Mr. Llewellyn had fixed his fancy there, instead of on that other,

how happily everything would have come round! but it is not too late even now!" and the old man felt brighter and more hopeful than he had felt for a single hour since Sir Geoffrey's death.

"Anna dear," said Max, when the evening lamps were lighted, and they were quietly shut in secure from interruption, "I want you to give me all your attention this evening, I have a long story to tell you, and a very important one. It concerns Sir Geoffrey and that poor woman you saw last night. I have no doubt you wondered very much that I should take you to such a scene, but I assure you, I had a very strong reason for doing so, just as I have now a very strong reason for telling you the strange sad story contained here." He laid his hand, as he spoke, on a packet of papers in Newton's writing.

Anna looked up startled and uneasy. What was coming? Was the dark cloud, which she felt had been so long hanging over their little household, about to break now? Putting away her working materials, she drew her chair to his side, and prepared to give him her undivided attention.

Max spread the papers before him gravely.

"I may have occasion," he said, "to refer to these from time to time, as I go on, but I think it will simplify matters to your mind very much if I tell you the story in my own words." So he commenced.

"In the year 1851, Sir Geoffrey Colet, who had been suffering from some slight attack of low fever, was ordered by his doctors to travel through Norway or Scotland for change of air and scene, the cold bracing climate of the north being much needed to re-establish his health. He selected the latter

country, and during the late summer months, and through the autumn of that year, made the tour of the Western Highlands, towards winter, making his way to the capital, intending to stay there a short time before his return to Cornwall.

"Sir Geoffrey at this time was about forty-five years of age, and from what I can remember, a very different man to the Sir Geoffrey Colet of later years—a softer and more genial man—not so all-absorbed in his collections and art treasures; his old-fashioned extreme courtesy lending a charm to his manner, which latterly it entirely lacked. The extreme courtesy remained, it is true, to the last hour of his life, but the affability which lent the charm was gone, and the courtesy henceforth repelled, and kept at a distance, rather than fascinated or attracted.

"Some ten or twelve years previously, Sir Geoffrey had sustained two severe shocks. A young lady to whom he was engaged to be married, had suddenly taken some fever and died in a few days. This must have been a terrible blow to him, for he was no doubt greatly attached to her. Shortly after this, his only sister, a girl of seventeen, eloped with a young lieutenant in the Hussars, who was at the time under orders to sail for India. Thither, without even a farewell to her brother, she accompanied him, and before the end of a second year, her husband first, and she a few days later, fell victims to cholera, leaving their two young children, Archibald and Llewellyn, to their Uncle's charge.

"These events, occurring as they did in rapid succession, greatly tried Sir Geoffrey, and

rendered him for many years not a morose, but a reserved silent man, and loth to go into general society.

"At forty-five years of age, however, he had, to a certain extent, over-lived these things, a craving and longing seem to have sprung up in his heart for closer home ties and affections; he began to go a little more into society, and possibly might have chosen a wife from among his equals in station, had not the illness I have mentioned occurred, to drive him, in obedience to the doctor's orders, to undertake the journey to the north, which ended so disastrously for him.

"This was Sir Geoffrey's first visit to the Scotch capital; accordingly he devoted the greater part of every day to visiting the various objects of interest in the city and neighbourhood, generally ending the evening

at one of the theatres, where at that time some of the Italian operas were being rather well put upon the stage.

"On one of these evenings, entering the theatre somewhat late, he was surprised to see a very young lady taking the part of the *prima donna*, who had been seized with a sudden cold and hoarseness, and was consequently incapable of performing. Something in the young lady's appearance (he did not know what) attracted his attention, and instead of leaving the theatre as he at first intended, he remained a close and interested spectator of the piece. The young lady's acting was undoubtedly inferior to that of the celebrated actress whose place she attempted to fill—she was emphatically 'a young lady' throughout, instead of the impassioned gipsy-girl she strove to represent.

Her voice and style, too, were entirely unsuited for operatic melody; nevertheless, she met with extreme favour from the not too critical audience, who perhaps sympathizing with the manager in his difficulty, and willing to show their complaisance, at the end of the second act, loudly encored her. She came forward on the stage, repeatedly bowing her thanks, and then instead of repeating her Italian song, broke forth into a simple heart-stirring Scotch ballad. Then it was that Sir Geoffrey discovered the secret of her attraction for him; not in face, nor figure, but in voice and style, she brought back forcibly his dead lost love, and when the touching words of the song, 'O, to call back the days that are not,' fell plaintively from her lips, a rush of recollections swept down upon him, the theatre and its gaily dressed audience

faded from his sight, and he was once more in the bright glad days of his early manhood, with his lost darling by his side.

"He left the theatre immediately the song ended; any other music, even the best, he felt would jar upon him in the mood he was then in. Only one feeling remained in his heart, an absolute longing and hungering to hear the song once more. Accordingly the next evening, he was again in his place at the theatre, but to his great disappointment the *prima donna* had sufficiently recovered to resume her part, and he had the mortification of seeing 'the young lady' performing a very inferior character, and passing altogether unnoticed.

"He sat out the piece, barely controlling his impatience, then placing himself near a passage by which he knew the performers would

leave the building, determined to watch and wait until the young girl came out.

"From where he stood he could distinctly hear the manager talking in harsh, rough tones to some one. Presently the young actress came out with signs of tears on her face, and rapidly passing in front of him, went her way along the dark, silent street. Sir Geoffrey quickly overtook her, intending possibly to follow her to her home, and there to prefer his strange request that she would sing the song once more.

"As he walked behind her, he could hear that the girl was sobbing, and seemed in great distress. This was more than he could bear; he lifted his hat in his most courtly style, and addressed her—

"'You appear to be in great trouble, madam,' he said, 'can I be of any service to you?'"

"Without the least hesitation or reserve she answered him—'I am in great trouble, for our manager has just told me that he can supply my place at half my present salary, and if I do not consent to his terms must consider myself dismissed at the end of the week. I must starve, that is all, for I can never live upon what he will give me.'

"'Have you no friends?' asked Sir Geoffrey, kindly.

"'Yes,' replied the girl, 'I have a father and mother living, but it is perfectly impossible I can ever go back to them.'

"Then, in reply to Sir Geoffrey's questions, she told him all her history (she had not then very much to tell, poor thing), as they continued walking slowly towards her lodging.

"Her name, she said, was Margaret Buchanan, and she was the only child of a minister of the Scottish Kirk, the sole pastor

although a good groundwork of Bible knowledge, Scottish history, and English grammar had been laid by her father's care, and her ill-balanced, head-strong temperament well kept under by his stern, unbending rule. Once, however, escaped from his control, her real disposition rapidly developed, and on her father writing to desire her to return home, she at once asserted her independence, and informed him she had wearied of the quiet life of their island, and intended for the future to maintain herself in some way in one of the large towns. A command from her father to return was passed over unnoticed, and when the old man himself journeyed from his distant home in search of her, he arrived in Glasgow only to find that she had left that morning for London, she had stated, but in reality for Edinburgh, taking with her

all her clothes, and what little money she possessed. The father had no money to spend in what might prove a fruitless search; no means of even setting the telegraph wires going, and after a few days of hopeless enquiry, was compelled to return to his pastorate a broken-hearted, prematurely-aged man.

"Meanwhile the girl Margaret, arrived in Edinburgh, had succeeded beyond her hopes in finding employment for herself. At an inn, where she had gone for refreshment, she made the acquaintance of the proprietor of a small singing supper-room in the city, who, satisfied with her voice and style of ballad singing, had at once engaged her for a nightly performance at his rooms. From this step she mounted higher; first into one of the smaller theatres as one of the walking ladies,

and subsequently into the large theatre, where Sir Geoffrey first saw and heard her.

"The chief point in Margaret Buchanan's character, which seems to have been at once the secret of her success and failure in life, was her intense obstinacy, her strong self-will. When once a thing entered into her brain, everything else must give way to its accomplishment. My own belief is, that from the first moment she saw the interest Sir Geoffrey took in her, and knew of his rank and title, she made up her mind to become Lady Colet, and this at any cost. Sir Geoffrey, greatly fascinated by her style, and above all by her singing, seems to have fallen deeply in love with her. At first he strove strenuously against his passion, and used his best efforts to influence the girl for her own good. He so far succeeded that she consented to allow him to take her home to her parents

for a time, stipulating she must afterwards return to her theatrical life in Edinburgh.

"Arrived at her old home, a sad surprise awaited her. Her mother had died broken-hearted at her disappearance from among them, and her father, in weak health and great poverty, was scarcely fitted to perform his pastoral duties. He received his daughter with forgiveness, but urged upon her the necessity of a new course of life. To Sir Geoffrey he offered the poor hospitality of his cottage, and tendered his best thanks for the kindness shown to his daughter.

"Margaret now appears to have made the most of her opportunities. She doubled and trebled her fascinations towards Sir Geoffrey, and at the same time gave him to understand that unless he married her, their friendship and acquaintance must cease.

"Sir Geoffrey, at once fascinated and re-

pelled, quickly lost all control over himself, and within three weeks of his arrival at the pastor's cottage consented to the performance of a Scotch marriage. This was of the simplest and most irregular form; he merely, in the presence of her father, took the girl's hand in his, and asked her if she would be his wife. She replied in the affirmative, and the marriage was completed. No other witness was present, and the sole written testimony of the marriage was on the fly-leaf of the Bible she had asked him to present to her in order, as she phrased it, she might see her name as his wife in his dear writing.

"One word more about this Bible," said Max, taking up in his hand the almost mouldy volume. "The leaf containing John xi. is cut out, you will see. This was Sir Geoffrey's doing, one idle summer's afternoon, in the

pastor's cottage on the island. There had been a Bible exposition to the poor people, and Sir Geoffrey, toying with his pen-knife, had cut out a leaf from the open Bible lying before his wife, not wilfully, but in idleness. 'Do not mutilate God's word, my son,' had been the pastor's reproof, as the leaf fluttered to the ground, and Sir Geoffrey had picked it up, and replaced it with expressions of regret. This leaf was found by Llewellyn in a casket, after Sir Geoffrey's death, supposed to have fallen from the volume as he withdrew it from its hiding-place. But that you will hear more about as we go on."

"I want you, Anna," said Max, here breaking off his narrative, "particularly to bear in mind that throughout this story I am giving you my own ideas to a great extent. Of course Lady Colet (for I suppose we must

call her so) made her dying confession in far different words to mine, but I am endeavouring to bring common sense to bear on the matter, and to see it in the light of my knowledge of her character and Sir Geoffrey's. Whether Sir Geoffrey ever intended to acknowledge this marriage is, to my mind, extremely doubtful. A Scotch marriage of this sort is always very difficult to prove, and performed in that far-away island, with an almost bed-ridden old man for the only witness, the difficulties would be increased ten-fold. At any rate this is what he did; he carried Margaret away with him to Italy (writing to Newton at the time that his health would not allow him to winter in England), and enjoyed, to the full, her fascinations and attractions; then brought her back to her home on the island, telling her that business

called him away to Germany, where he must remain for some time to come. Thither accordingly he went, and made arrangements with a banker, at Berlin, to pay his wife a fair income annually on condition she remained in her own home. If she left the island, the income would be immediately, and for ever, forfeited.

"During their stay in Florence, Sir Geoffrey became possessed of that wonderful group of sculpture which stands at the entrance of his private chapel, the 'Adoration of the Magi.' He most likely communicated to his wife the secret of the opening of the casket, and the value it would prove as a hidden receptacle. (I will explain all this to you, Anna, as I go on.) In any case he wore the strange little key always on his watch guard, and when on returning to Castle Mount he brought away

with him the Bible containing the written evidence of their marriage, he most likely secreted it immediately in this most secure hiding place.

"It is difficult entirely to understand Sir Geoffrey's conduct in this matter. I imagine after their marriage, Margaret's self-willed, ill-regulated disposition very soon betrayed itself, and he felt the impracticability of installing one so uncultivated and so grossly ignorant of *les convenances* as the mistress of Castle Mount, and of introducing her into society as his wife. Yet at the same time he kept the Bible safely, intending evidently to produce it at some future time, possibly in justification or support of the will it was his intention no doubt to make, fairly providing for Llewellyn and his brother, leaving the Castle and the Cornwall estates to his only

child, and making, I daresay, handsome restitution to his wife—a sop to his conscience, as it were; thus satisfying himself that wrong would be done to no one, he would be spared the pain and mortification of introducing Margaret Buchanan as his wife, or of living with one whose violent, unchecked temper rendered far from a pleasant companion. Death, however, coming upon him so suddenly, interfered with his plans, and he was compelled at the last moment to trust entirely to Llewellyn's honour and generosity.

"Margaret appears barely to have believed Sir Geoffrey's statement as to his residence in Germany. She must in some way have had access to his private papers, for she seems to have formed a very fair calculation as to his position in society, and as to what he would or would not do. Much, no doubt, in

the early days of their love and confidence he had told her, and the rest she had probably ascertained for herself.

"She knew for certain his London and Cornwall addresses; had a very good idea of his yearly income, and the largeness of his estates.

"Her great ambition was to have her name and position as his wife acknowledged, and her one desire that her child should be born in its father's house and received into the world with all due honour, as his rightful heir.

"Having once set her mind to these things, no power on earth would have turned her from her purpose, and her father dying at this time, she was left free to act as she would. She confesses what little love she had at first had for Sir Geoffrey had now utterly died out,

and she had but one object in life—the gratification of her ambition.

"Accordingly, immediately after Sir Geoffrey's departure for Germany she set to work to accomplish her own ends. She says that her old father in no way countenanced her ambition, and to the day of his death was in total ignorance of her plans.

"The only person whom she took into her confidence was the servant-girl at the Manse, whom she instructed to sign the receipts for her income, thereby preventing her real signature being known to Sir Geoffrey's agents at Berlin. She also desired the girl to receive the money for her during her absence in England, and especially instructed her to inform Sir Geoffrey, through these bankers, of the expected birth of her child, and the necessity for an increased allowance.

This was at once granted by the Baronet, and I believe from what I have since heard, has been uninterruptedly paid to this servant girl during the past eighteen years.

"In the January of 1853, Margaret's father died. The birth of her child was expected in the March of that year, and about a month previously she set off for Cornwall, travelling thither by easy stages. I suppose she had ascertained beforehand the exact position of Castle Mount in the county, and the long journey, so full of difficulties to an inexperienced traveller like herself, appears to have stimulated rather than checked the flow of her ambition.

"She had, however, somewhat overrated her powers of endurance in her then state of health.

"The sea passage taxed her strength greatly, and she succeeded only in reaching

a small village within ten miles of Castle Mount; she was seized with sudden illness in the streets, conveyed to the parish workhouse, where her child, a girl, was born."

Here Max paused again.

"Anna," he said, "I hope you thoroughly understand that I am telling you this story with the greatest reluctance. It is only the absolute necessity of the case which drives me to it. You must hear the whole truth now from beginning to end, and I would sooner you should hear it from me than from anyone else."

Anna looked up wonderingly.

"'The absolute necessity of the case!' 'The whole truth from beginning to end!' What could Max mean? How could the love-story of Sir Geoffrey Colet and the unfortunate Margaret in any way concern her?"

Max, however, gave her no time to exclaim

nor to ask questions. He went on with the story rapidly now, in a somewhat frigid and constrained style.

"This unforeseen frustration of her plans seems in no wise to have diverted Margaret from her other purpose, viz., that of forcing Sir Geoffrey to acknowledge herself and child. She behaved in a more dignified and reserved manner than might have been expected from a person of her slender education; took no one into her confidence, and even allowed the parish authorities to assume she was—what she in no sense felt herself to be—an unfortunate in the lower class of life. She quietly waited in the workhouse, accepting workhouse fare and workhouse accommodation without a murmur, until her infant was turned a week old. Then, when the nurse and sisters were off guard in the infirmary, crept out of the ward one dark, wintry

afternoon with her child, and made her way across the moors and hills towards Castle Mount.

"She seems to have had a motive in all this secrecy and concealment. She did not wish the wandering, forlorn, peasant woman to be identified as the Lady Colet who would by-and-by flash out upon the neighbourhood. Her idea was, no doubt, to arrive late and secretly at the Castle, have a private and quiet interview with Sir Geoffrey, force him, for fear of an open scandal, to acknowledge her claims and her child's, and then to shine out upon the county as a lady by birth and right, and not as an obscure peasant-girl, by whom Sir Geoffrey had been entrapped into a *mésalliance.*

"And this her vanity and ambition led her to believe was possible.

"In this, her second venture, however,

fortune was again contrary. In her fear of betraying herself she had not ventured to make any enquiries as to the distance of Castle Mount from the workhouse, nor the nearest way of reaching it. She had seen it standing out high and brown above the distant rocks, from the windows of the ward where she lay, and had imagined she could, by keeping it steadily in sight, soon make her way thither.

"The result can be imagined. One winding lane after another, curved roads and hills, all contributed to deceive her and to lead her in an opposite direction to the one she intended, and at about ten o'clock at night, in the steep, snow-covered road, she sank down with the babe in her arms, utterly exhausted, worn out with fatigue, and with the fever mounting to her brain.

"Then the full misery of her situation burst upon her for the first time. There was she with a new-born child in her arms, in the bleakest and most desolate country imaginable; snow covering the ground beneath her feet, snow in the clouds overhead, and no living soul, she supposed, within miles. If she perished in the snow she would but be set down as some unfortunate tramp or beggar. If she had by chance met with a belated traveller, and had asserted herself as Lady Colet, of Castle Mount, she would without fail be set down as a thief or impostor. The utter wildness and impracticability of her whole plan from first to last seems to have struck her then.

"How could she force Sir Geoffrey to acknowledge her claims, supposing he were not inclined so to do? Her father, her only

witness, was dead, and the Bible, containing the only written testimony to their marriage, safely hidden away somewhere, if not destroyed.

"Then she gave up her project utterly. She sank down wearily by the roadside, making up her mind to die with her child.

As she lay there burning and shivering from head to foot, the ring of horses' feet along the frosty road sounded in her ears, and she sprang to her feet, determining at any cost to make one more effort.

"The stranger proved to be a lad of about fifteen, returning from the Castle. She accosted him hurriedly, asking him the way to Castle Mount, and the distance thither. Still seven miles off! And her heart sinks once more, and she is again on the point of giving up all hopes, when suddenly it flashes

across her brain that there is yet a chance of saving her babe and of having it acknowledged as Sir Geoffrey's child. With a few hurried words she committed the infant to the lad's care, and then fled as fast as her poor wearied feet and the rough slippery paths would allow, fearful lest the boy might return the babe to her charge, and refuse to fulfil her commission."

Here Max paused for breath, and Anna, flushed and excited, and interested beyond measure in the story, asked eagerly—

"What became of the child, Max? What became of the mother?"

"About the child we will talk presently, Anna. First let me tell you about the poor mother."

"With the fever mounting to her brain she fled on across the snowy fields, stumbling,

eager, scarcely knowing whither she went; sometimes rushing onward, to reach Castle Mount as she thought, at other times crouching and hiding in hedges at the sound of footsteps, until at length at dawn the next day she was found, by some labourers going to their work, insensible on a door-step in the street of a village, some fifteen miles on the other side of Castle Mount.

"And now for nearly eighteen years the poor miserable woman is not seen nor heard of by anyone connected with this story.

"And those eighteen years were passed in a pauper lunatic asylum.

"The poor people who found her by the roadside naturally conveyed her to the only refuge poor people know, the parish workhouse, and from thence, after brain fever had run its course, and the parish doctors had

pronounced her reason hopelessly gone, she was removed by order of the justices to the county lunatic asylum.

"Here she was better fed and tended, and during the long years that followed, her reason appears to have in some measure returned to her, not altogether I should imagine, from the way in which she subsequently acted. In these asylums as patients recover, they have various sorts of work parcelled out to them, and the mending and needlework fell to Lady Colet's charge. After some years she began to be considered harmless, and was allowed to go into the town to make small purchases; and about a year ago, judging from the certificates made by the doctors, who considered her cured, she was formally discharged by the visiting justices. She arrived in London, in the beginning of

this year, homeless, friendless, and with only a small sum of money in her pocket, with which the justices had supplied her as a means of support, until she could in some way or other earn her own living.

"It would be difficult thoroughly to understand the state of Margaret's mind at this time. My own impression is that she never altogether lost her reason, nor ever altogether recovered it. During the long years of her confinement in the county lunatic asylum, the one all dominant idea still held sway over her mind, and in one form or another was ever present. She appears to have gained from various sources much information respecting Sir Geoffrey and his nephews, learned that no daughter of his had ever been spoken of, and that Llewellyn March was considered to be the heir. On one occasion, possibly when

making some of her small purchases in the village, the name of the young man to whom she had confided her baby was mentioned in connection with that of Mr. March, and as a friend of his, and this seems to have awakened a rush of recollections which had for many years lain dormant. Henceforward a terrible longing and hungering seems to have taken possession of her heart—to see and clasp her little one once more.

"As time went on, and she progressed towards convalescence, there appears to have been more method, more cunning if you will, in her plan of procedure. The hope of Sir Geoffrey ever acknowledging her to be his wife had apparently died out of her heart, or perhaps given way to the mother's passionate yearning after her unknown darling. She ceased altogether to talk or

enquire of Sir Geoffrey and his movements, concentrating her attention more especially on the discovery of the man, whom she believed to be the guardian of her child. Of him, however, with her utmost diligence she could learn but little in that remote Cornish village. At one time—so they told her—he had been seen constantly with Mr. March, either in London or at Castle Mount, but of late the friends had been somewhat more apart, Mr. March all engrossed with the society of his promised wife, and the doctor absorbed in his professional duties."

Anna starts with a strange puzzled look in her eyes at these words; and now she bends forward, eagerly fixing her gaze on Max's face, drinking in his every word, noting each change of look, or tone, as he goes on.

"All, however, she could learn about this doctor were some few particulars as to the

members of his family, and the name of the neighbourhood where he lived. Thither immediately upon her release from the asylum her steps were bent, and there she remained watching, searching, listening, with one intense longing and hope in her heart.

"Carefully putting by the small sum of money which had been presented to her by the justices—in case of need so she said—she wandered about from street to street, gaining a feeble sort of living by her ballad-singing. Her voice was still rich and powerful, although much of its sweetness was gone, and her recollection of her old songs had almost failed her. Only one could she remember perfectly, or sing through without faltering, and that was the old song she used to sing to her lover in those far-away days in Scotland.

"And as she sang she searched, and as she

wandered hither and thither, she prayed one wild passionate prayer—'Oh God, that I may see and clasp my little one before I die.'

"Once singing thus, she came upon a house where the name of the man she sought was written upon the door-plate, and from that moment the house was watched by her large mournful black eyes at every possible opportunity. Every scrap of news about its inmates, gleaned in all sorts of imaginable and unimaginable ways, and even on more than one occasion the daughter of the house watched and followed."

Anna's tears fell thick and fast now, as the truth began to dawn upon her mind.

Max pauses for a moment.

"Hear me now to the end of this sad story, Anna dear," he says, and the girl makes no effort to interrupt him.

"One thought has now taken possession of her heart, 'The husband, who cast off the wife, shall be forced to acknowledge the daughter,' and once more she makes the long wearisome journey into Cornwall, intending to confront the man who has so bitterly darkened her life, to implore, if need be to threaten perhaps, at any rate to compel him to receive her child as his daughter and heiress.

"She arrives at Castle Mount at length, after a long day's travelling, sometimes in trains, sometimes on foot, with an occasional lift from some country waggon.

"It is nearly midnight when she reaches the Castle; she has allowed herself no pause, nor break in the long day's journey; she will, she thinks, sleep in some out-house till day-break, and watch her opportunity to obtain an interview with Sir Geoffrey.

"To her intense surprise the Castle gates are wide open, and signs of revelry and festival are on every side.

"All unnoticed, she creeps into the park, all unnoticed she makes her way into the house, entering by a side door which opens into the armoury, and then sinking into a corner behind one of the knights in his glinting steel armour, she tries to collect her thoughts, and decide upon what is best to be done. The music bewilders her, the lights dazzle her wandering brain, even the rich scent of the flowers coming in from the opened windows overpowers her enfeebled senses. She covers her face with her hands as she sinks upon the floor, and there behind the plumed armed knight she says she thinks she slept.

"How long she lay crouching there she does

not know. She awakens, hearing a heavy step—a stumbling, weary step—on the floor close by her side, and, looking up, she sees Sir Geoffrey slowly passing along the corridor.

"Eighteen years since she last looked upon that face, yet, in an instant, she knows it as the one which brought so much sorrow and pain into her life!

"Whither can he be going, creeping away like this in the midst of the dance and revelry? Without a word, without a sound, she comes forth from her hiding-place and follows him, follows him like a ghost almost in his very shadow, slipping in and out between the stands of arms and mounted knights, breathing as he breathes, pausing with him as he pauses to detach a tiny key from his watch chain, and once more going on with him again to the very door of the chapel.

"What was her amazement when she saw him unlock the casket in the group of sculpture, and draw the old Bible from its hiding-place.

"In a moment she recognised the faded cover, and the thought flew like lightning through her brain, 'He has taken it out to destroy the last and only evidence of our miserable marriage.'

"Now hear her own words, Anna," said Max, taking up one of the papers in Newton's writing, 'Then I flashed out in front of him, and before he had time to know who I was, or whence I came, I had snatched the Bible out of his hand, and, lifting up my voice, I cursed him with a loud and bitter curse. I held the Bible high above my head, and called God to witness that as he had blighted and marred my life, so would his own be darkened

and drear, and to God he would have to account for the misery he had wrought. I saw him start, I saw him tremble, I watched the look of horror spreading itself over his face, and the blood swelling his veins and mounting to his temples, then, without a word or groan, he fell, at my very feet, speechless and gasping!

"'Then a great terror came upon me, and my father's quiet, peaceful voice, as he lay on his death-bed, seemed to sound in my ears, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord," and I trembled from head to foot with the deed I had done. Was I indeed God's avenging angel, dealing out His wrath upon this sinner?

"'I knelt by the side of the quiet, lifeless old man, and prayed, "O God, if thou hast indeed used me as a rod wherewith to smite

this one, in mercy visit it not upon my head." Then, I thought, he will surely die before help can reach him from those dancers and revellers. The rope of the chapel bell hung low in the porch; with all my might I swung it round my arm and pulled it once. Then, holding the Bible tightly in my hand, I turned and fled.' "

CHAPTER XIII.

"ANNA, you know all now," said Max, with a sigh of relief, pushing the papers together in a heap. "Believe me, dear," he added, laying his hand tenderly on the girl's shoulder, "I would not have told you this sad, miserable story had it been possible to have kept the truth from you any longer."

Anna lifted up her tear-stained face. The first terrible shock over, her next feeling was one of deepest, truest gratitude to Max and his mother.

"How can I ever thank you," she exclaimed, looking towards Mrs. Trego, and

holding out her hand to Max, "how can I ever thank you two dear ones for your kindness and goodness to the poor little castaway?"

Then follows the one all-absorbing thought, "What will Llewellyn think when he hears that I am a blood relation?"

It did not for a moment occur to her simple mind that she was to take Llewellyn's place, nor even share his inheritance. A place would, no doubt, be found for her somewhere among the Marchs and Colets, and what if it should bring her nearer to him! The mere thought made her heart beat wildly.

Poor little Anna! could she have put her thoughts into words, she would have sung with the grand old Greek—

"He only is a living man; the rest are flitting shades."

Max guessed her thoughts.

"Yes, Anna, you must bid good-by to the old home now," he said, bitterness and pain rising up in his heart. "You will take your place in a far higher sphere than my mother or I could ever reach, no matter how hard I might work."

Anna was hurt.

"You are cruel, Max," she said gently, "you know it can make no difference."

"Yes, it can make no difference," Max assented; she was quite right, for rich or poor he felt she could never give him more than the sweet sisterly love she now held out to him.

"There is still much to talk over, Anna," he went on, "but I scarcely know where to begin. I have asked Newton to come in to-morrow and arrange matters with you. I

think you have heard enough for one night. In the morning we shall see things more clearly." He spoke wearily, not as though he were congratulating an heiress on her sudden accession to wealth. He, the strong, broad-shouldered Max was sad and sick at heart.

A servant came in at this moment, handing Anna a tiny note.

"The lady will not give her name, sir," she said, in answer to Max's "Who is it?" On the note were written these few words—"A lady would much like to see Miss Colet for a few minutes in private."

"Trego" had been written at first, but afterwards crossed through, and "Colet" substituted.

"Who can this lady be? Who knows my name, almost before I do myself?" won-

dered Anna, as she went her way to Max's consulting-room, where the stranger was waiting. She opened the door of the little square room—a slip off a larger one—and stood face to face with Lady Victoria Cathrow. The light was very dim, for the servant had hurriedly lighted but one jet of gas, and Anna could only see a long, shimmering black silk, and a very small, pale face with perfect features, and a bandeau of gold hair, shining out above some rich soft wrap.

She came forward to meet Anna.

"I ought to apologise," she said, in her lowest, sweetest tones, "for coming so late. I am Lady Victoria Cathrow. I was so anxious to see you, I took advantage of a quiet evening, and came alone with my maid."

Anna bowed in reply. What had she to say, indeed? And this was the girl Llew-

ellyn March was so deeply in love with! What could he see in her? Her style was perfect, yes, beyond doubt, and, after all, men think so much of style and manner. Her voice, too, was very low and soft, and certainly her features were very well cut and moulded; but for Llewellyn March to choose such a one! Ah, well! It was the old story of the sons of God mating with the daughters of men!

There was a pause—Victoria waiting for Anna to say something, Anna waiting for Victoria to speak.

Anna remained standing under the single jet of gas; she had some clinging dark dress on, and her black hair fell in a heavy mass to her waist. She lifted it in her hand from one shoulder to the other. It was a trick she had when growing impatient, and which Max

sometimes would characterise as Anna "shaking her mane; she is growing restive."

"Why doesn't the girl say what she has to say, and let me go," she thought, wearied with her long talk with Max and the rush of emotions it had called forth, and anxious to escape to rest and quiet thought.

But Victoria found it very difficult to say what she had to say.

"You are an old friend of Mr. March, are you not?" at length she asks, hesitatingly.

"My brother is," replied Anna; then correcting herself, "Dr. Trego, I mean."

"I suppose," said Victoria, noting the correction, and speaking very slowly in a cold, constrained voice, "I ought to congratulate you on your good fortune, Miss Colet, but I, as an old friend of Mr. March, find it difficult to do so."

Anna is rousing herself now. Does this girl, with her baby face and soft voice, mean to insult her in some covert way?

"I don't know, Lady Victoria, to what good fortune you allude," she replies, with a slightly heightened voice. "And as for congratulations, my own friends have not as yet thought it necessary to offer me any."

"I beg your pardon," said Victoria, "but it is so difficult for me to ask what I have come only and expressly to ask of you, that to gain time I fear I have been guilty of an impertinence."

"But why not say at once what you wish to say?" replies Anna bluntly, utterly wearied of the young lady and her circumlocutions. "It will not take a great many words; tell me at once what you have come for."

"Then I will do so," said Victoria, as

calmly and sweetly as ever. "I have come to you for news of Mr. Llewellyn March."

"For news of Llewellyn March," repeats Anna, amazed. "You, about to be married to him, come to me for news of him!"

"No, no," said Victoria, hurriedly. "I am about to be married to Sir Charles Oldfield; my engagement with Mr. March is at an end. He is, however, a valued friend of mine, and I am uneasy at what I have heard, or rather have not heard, of him lately, for since he left Castle Mount about a month ago, none of his friends have heard of, or from him. Some say he has been ill in London, some that he has left the country, but I thought that you or Dr. Trego, being such old friends, might know something for certain."

Anna was beginning to comprehend the

situation a little now, but very slowly. The engagement at an end! Well, then, it must be this girl's doing, for Llewellyn would be true to the death to the one he had chosen. Yes, she was half-hearted, she was sure; she could see it in her face, and it was always for these half-hearted girls that men went mad, and were ready to lay down their lives. She did not say all this standing there under the gas jet; she only lifted her heavy weight of hair from one shoulder to the other once more. She only looked at Victoria from head to foot with her lip slightly curling, and eyes flashing under their thick, dark lashes.

"And *you*," she said, with marked emphasis, "threw *him* over!"

Victoria cowered before her; she could, she thought, have faced Llewellyn himself better than this slight, dark girl whom she

had imagined she could have cross-questioned at her pleasure.

"Miss Colet," she said, somewhat steadying herself, "you have not yet answered my question. Will you endeavour to do so; what has become of Mr. March?"

"I have not answered your question, because I am not able to," replied Anna. "But I will see if Dr. Trego knows more than I do."

She swept out of the room without another glance at Victoria, and went into the cozy little sitting-room, where Max was still standing, leaning against the mantle-piece.

"Max," she said, coming straight in front of him, "where has Mr. March gone?"

Max looked fixedly at her.

"Why do you wish to know, Anna? How does it concern you?"

"There is a lady here enquiring for him—the Lady Victoria Cathrow—and I, too, would wish to know what has become of him."

"Anna, be reasonable," said Max, quietly. "It is quite right that Llewellyn should give place to you. You, as Sir Geoffrey's daughter, surely have a prior claim to the castle and estates, and he very gracefully and rightly yields to you."

"That is what it all means, then?" said Anna, barely controlling herself. "This is what is behind it all. He yields his inheritance to me; that girl, who professed to love him, throws him over, and he wanders away, heaven knows where! And you could think I would accept the sacrifice!"

Then she added, more quietly—

"Max, I ask you once more; tell me, if you know, where he has gone?"

"He has gone to the war; I know no more than this. I do not even know which side he has joined; I only know he has gone."

"To the war!" echoed a voice behind them sadly, for Victoria had followed Anna across the hall, and now stood waiting at the door.

"And you, who loved him, let him go!" said Anna reproachfully to Max.

"Anna, be reasonable," Max began again.

"Yes," she said, "I will be reasonable; I will not reproach you, for you were only a friend! But you," she said, turning to Victoria, all the fire in her nature breaking forth now, "you, who let him take you in his arms and kiss you as his promised wife, how will you stand before God's judgment seat, and answer for what you have done? How will you feel if they come to you and tell you that the breast against which you leaned

has been pierced with a bullet, or that he is buried, like a dog, in some trench on the battle-field!"

"Hush, hush, have mercy on me!" said Victoria, piteously. "What would you have me do; what can I do?"

"Do?" echoed Anna, her voice sinking now very low. "Go find him wherever he is, take your place by his side, go on your knees and ask his forgiveness, and beg of him to take you back to his heart. Take a message to him from me that I will not touch one iota of his inheritance, and pray him to come back to his home and the hearts that love him."

"I am bound," said Victoria sadly, with white face and trembling lips. "I am bound with fetters of iron."

"Of gold! you mean," said Anna, scornfully. "Break your bonds, then; fire will

melt gold, and bend iron. Bound or free, no power in Heaven or earth should keep me from the man I loved. Fettered or unfettered, I would find my way to his side, and, living or dead, claim him for my own!"

And all this time Llewellyn was lying, face downwards, on the battle-field of Gravelotte!

END OF VOL. I.

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